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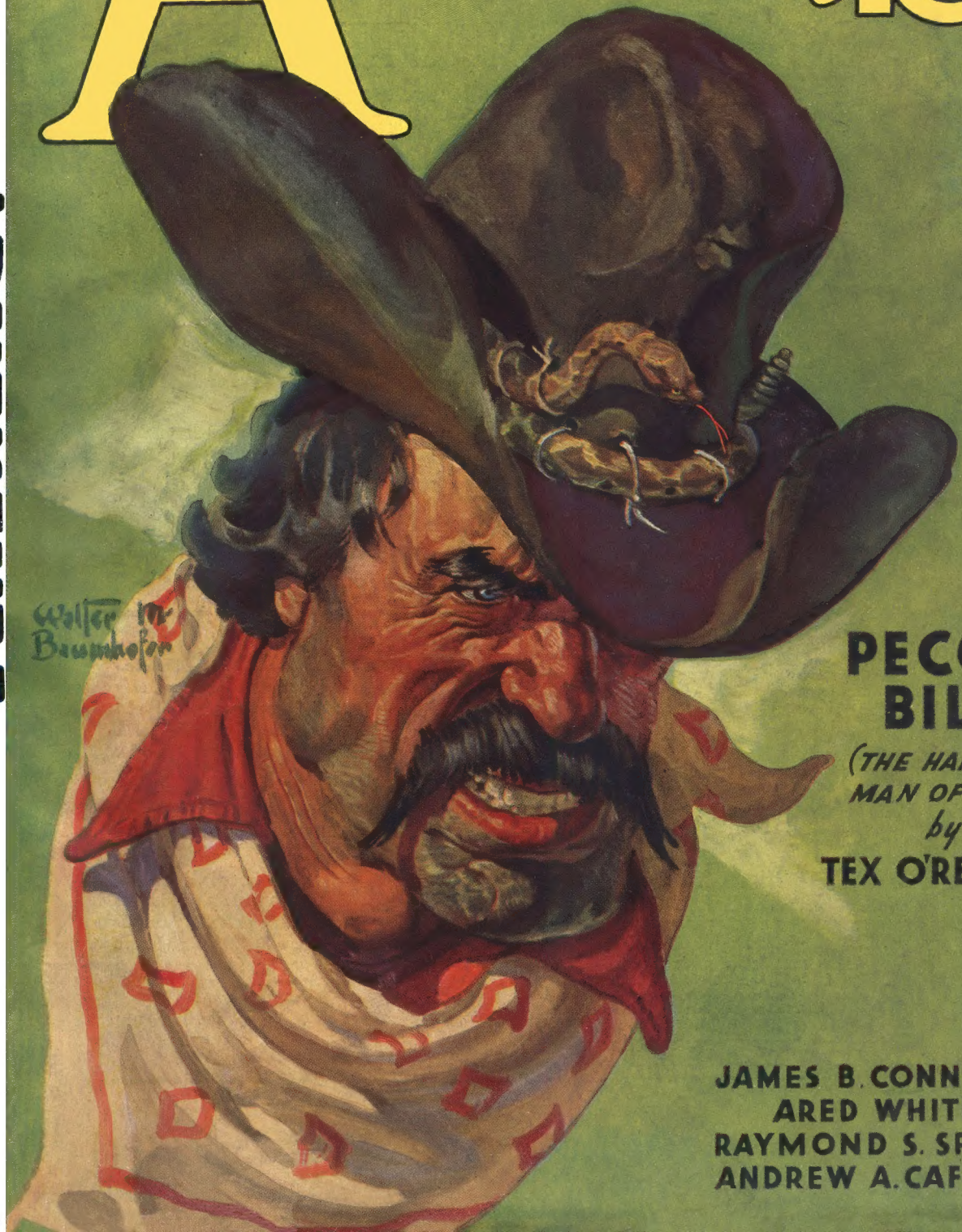

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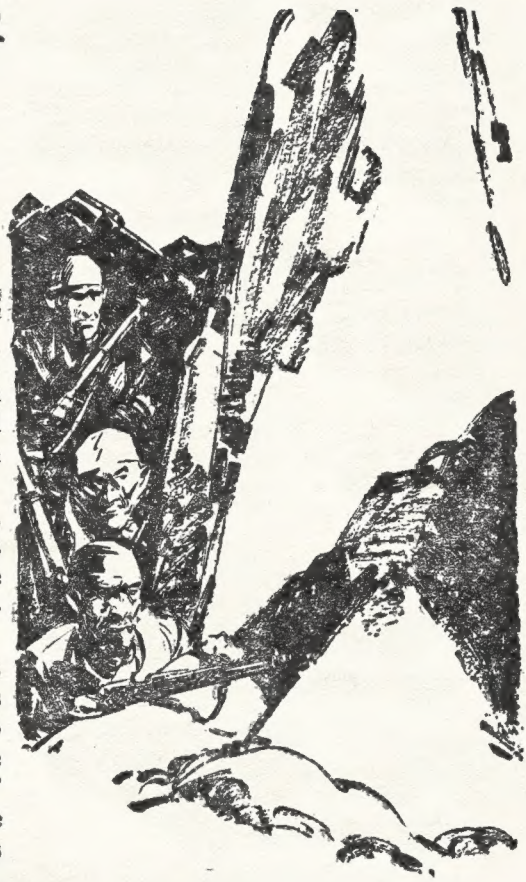
BRISTOL, THE BLUNDERER

A novelette

By MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT



CHAPTER I

THE SHIKARIS

THERE is a regiment on the Indian Army List whose stately official title is rarely spoken between soldiers.

From Peshawur to Cape Comorin, from the Commander-in-Chief in India to the last-joined drummer-boy, the regiment is known simply—and reverently—as "The Shikaris."

It is an easy name to remember, but that is not the reason why staff-officers in Simla, making out a list of corps to compose a punitive column when some of the turbulent frontier tribes are "up," always murmur: "The Shikaris, of course—and let's see, who else?" The Shikaris would not understand being left out. When there is active service, they expect to be included. They have earned the right to death or glory.

Like other Indian infantry battalions, the Shikaris have four companies. They are what is called a "class company" regiment; that is, each company is composed of men of a different race—one of Punjabi Mussulmans, one of Sikhs, one of Dogras and one of Pathans. But all have the same pride—the same spirit. Their native officers are picked men, of course: and their British officers—

You will not find any mention of the fact in Regulations, but it is nevertheless true that the Shikaris do not acquire their British officers in the customary manner. They are jealous of their spotless record, of the battle-honors on their colors and the light that shines in every soldier's eye when their name is mentioned. They are not satisfied to be led into battle by any "*chota sahib*" who has been able to pass out of Sandhurst with a sufficient percentage of academic excellence to qualify him for the Indian Army.

The Shikaris require qualities in their officers which cannot be represented by blue-pencil marks at the top of an examination paper.

To win an appointment to the Shikaris is proof that a man has been tested elsewhere and found worthy. It is a great honor.

To be finally accepted by the Shikaris—officers and men—as one of "our *sahibs*" is an accolade beyond all price.

CHAPTER II

FLANK PICKET

THE morning mist lay heavy on the Hills.

In the narrow pass, close walled on either hand by pitiless gray rock, some twenty native soldiers of various regiments crouched or sat behind what cover in the way of boulders and fallen rock-slides the place afforded, shivering in the chill dawn.

A British officer—a slim young man, very erect and with a prideful lift to his hard jaw—paced slowly up and down behind them, occasionally glancing at his sergeant, a veteran havildar who wore the insignia of the Shikaris on collar and shoulder-strap.

Behind and below them, out of sight in the darkness that still shrouded the lower depths, a convoy trampled past interminably, with clatter of hoof and groan of straining leather and the muffled cries of hired drivers.

The picket in the Pass of Bulahr was posted there to protect the flank of the convoy. Orders were brief and clear. "Hold the pass till the convoy has gone by. Then join the rear-guard."

For the Yakka Khel were "up", green banners flew in the Hills—and another of India's perennial little wars was in full swing.

Lieutenant Thomas Bristol, 99th Bom-

bay Infantry, was none too well satisfied with the men that had been given him for this responsible post.

They were recruits for the most part, going up to join depleted battalions in the zone of operations; just the scattered lot out of which convoy escorts are hastily formed in war, only to be broken up again when the convoy reaches its destination. The great strength of the Indian Army is in the mutual confidence between officer and man, built up by long association. These men had not yet been tried and tempered in the crucible of war; they did not know their officer; worst of all, they could sense—with the unerring instinct of Orientals—that their officer had no confidence in them.

Bristol glanced at his luminous watch-dial, peered vainly into the mist, thick in the pass out there. Might hide anything, that murk. He estimated the time the convoy had been passing. Twenty minutes more should see the end of it; and a good job, too. He wished to heaven he had a dozen Tommies instead of this motley outfit of rookies. Not a man of 'em worth their salt—except maybe Havildar Ali Khan. *He* was of the Shikaris.

Bristol had seen some service, but with British troops, during the year of apprenticeship which all prospective officers of the Indian Army must pass through before being appointed to a native regiment. For the rest, he had been brought up in the United States, under the tutelage of his American mother; he had acquired an unfortunate idea that all persons of color were "niggers," to be despised as such. Since being posted to the 99th, he'd been serving at the depot, drilling recruits, which had not improved his opinion of the native soldier in general.

Yet he was a keen young officer, in love with the profession of arms and grimly determined to show his stern and somewhat skeptical father that he could follow in that distinguished officer's footsteps as readily as his elder brother, who had died of fever just after being appointed to the Shikaris.

It had consequently become Lieutenant Bristol's consuming ambition to be appointed also to the Shikaris; and his young pride was such that he had demanded his father's pledge to use no influence whatever to gain him that appointment. He would, he swore, make himself such a name in the Indian Army that the Shikaris would demand the name of Lieutenant Thomas Bristol on their roll of officers.

The memory of his father's curt laugh still tortured his soul as he stood there staring into the curling mist.

Havildar Ali Khan moved with ghost-like silence to his side.

He was a tall man too; tall and thin, a Pathan whose skin was almost as white as Bristol's own. He was, in fact, a Yakka Khel—kin to the turbulent tribe for whose punishment troops were now assembling.

"It will be dawn soon, *sahib*. Then this cursed mist will clear," he murmured.

"Just as well," growled Bristol.

As the words left his lips, moving shadows suddenly took form in the gray vapor.

One of the two sentries let out a yell. The other went down beneath the rush of dark figures.

The walls of the defile echoed with a chorus of bloodthirsty howls.

A score of bounding, yelling swordsmen, naked to the waist, beards flecked with foam, their muscular arms brandishing their great blades above their turbaned heads, came leaping and scrambling over the boulders upon the startled picket.

"Ghazis!" exclaimed Ali Khan.

There was a scattering of rifle-shots, ineffective for the most part. Then as one man that picket arose and fled.

Jammed in the narrow opening between the two largest boulders, the Ghazis struggled to get through in pursuit, howling derisive triumph.

But their triumph was short-lived.

Bristol snatched up a bayonetted rifle which one of the recreants had dropped, and leaped forward.

His first lunge ripped out a Ghazi's belly; his second, high over the shoulder of his falling victim, tore into a lean brown throat. The others staggered back, shoving against the press of their eager compatriots behind.

"Hold here; some of you climb over and take the son of Shaitan in the rear!" yelled one.

Bristol didn't know Pushtu, but he could guess the strategy.

"Stop that flank attack, Ali Khan!" he called out, never doubting that the havildar was close at hand.

As he spoke he spiked to the ground a crawling Ghazi who thought to reach his legs under the overhang of the left boulder.

Another bounded suddenly forward, ere Bristol could disengage his bayonet; but he managed to tear the steel free in time to execute a "butt to the front." The Ghazi reeled back with a broken jaw.

Bristol had an instant to look around for Ali Khan.

The havildar was nowhere to be seen.

A Shikari run away? Impossible. Yet the pass was empty behind Bristol, and already, on both sides, the Ghazis were clambering over the higher rocks, their huge knives gripped between vengeful teeth.

In front, they bayed at him joyously, promising him unspeakable torments.

For answer, he suddenly snapped the rifle to his shoulder and emptied the magazine into the brown of them in one tremendous burst of rapid-fire.

Then, ere the shrieks of agony had died away, he dashed to his left, bayonetted a Ghazi who was dangling from a ledge ready to drop into the pass, and regained his post between the boulders before those in front could take advantage of his absence.

"They've left me here to die, the cowardly hounds," he muttered between clenched teeth. "Okay. They'll sure as hell find some dead Ghazis along with me."

He could not reload his rifle, having no ammunition.

But he drew his heavy Webley, letting it hang from its lanyard. It would claim six men's lives at the last.

"Allah!" shrieked the Ghazis. "Allah with us—kill the Angresi dog! He is all alone!"

Yet it was noticeable that those yells were the fiercer, the farther back they were from the defile.

A head appeared atop the right boulder; a head, and fierce eyes, and foam-flecked mouth. The man inched himself a little farther forward, gripped his sword, crouched to leap—

And tumbled over amongst his comrades with a great .455 Webley slug through his brain.

Two more instantly took his place; there were others working their way round the left boulder. This could not last.

Bristol made up his mind.

He'd let them have the five shots remaining in the Webley, then charge straight forward with the bayonet. They'd get him, of course; but he ought to do enough damage to check the attack until the convoy commander could take measures to meet it. The fugitives must have reached the convoy by this time. They'd know, below, that something was wrong.

Thus calmly, thus simply did Thomas Bristol plan to give his life for his duty.

Of abandoning the post that had been entrusted to him, he never even thought.

He crouched, hand dropping again to his pistol-butt —

"CHARGE! Sons of she camels! Wipe out your shame in blood, cousins of dungheaps!"

IT WAS the voice of Ali Khan, and bayonets glittered dully in the mist behind Bristol. A dozen men—his own men—came charging through the pass, bayonets advanced and brown faces set in lines that boded ill to the Ghazis who faced that steel. And they came on in silence, which boded worse. Behind them, with boot and rifle-butt and bitter words, Havildar Ali Khan drove them to their duty.

Bayonets clashed against Khyber knives—clashed and parried and thrust grimly home.

"Back, brothers!" screamed a Ghazi. "Allah is not with us this day!"

They turned to flee.

"Take cover. Rapid fire!" shouted Bristol, and the sustained roar of magazine-fire made the gorge a place of thunder and of death.

The attack which had almost won the pass of Bulahr faded into the mist and was gone.

"*Shabash, sahib!*" said Ali Khan in soldierly praise, his eyes glowing as he counted the dead Ghazis whom his officer had slain. "*That* was a great slaying."

Bristol turned and looked the Pathan sergeant straight in the eyes.

"No thanks to you," he said scornfully in his halting Urdu, "who abandoned your post when you saw Ghazi steel! I thought the Shikaris, at least, were made of better stuff."

Ali Khan stood as though turned to stone for a long moment.

Then he saluted, very correctly and stiffly, and turned to see to it that the men of the picket resumed their proper posts and that none were so foolish as to pursue down the gorge. And Thomas Bristol never knew how near, in that moment, he had been to death.

But discipline had not been able to subdue pride to the extent of producing any explanation—how Ali Khan, long inured in the ways of hill warfare, had known that help could not come in time from the convoy; how he had realized that the one chance was to rally the men while Bristol held the narrow pass; how he had taken that one chance, meaning all the time, if he could not succeed, to come back and die at his officer's side.

Five minutes later, a party of panting Tommies and Sikhs came stumbling up the pass under the leadership of a stout major, who swore mightily when he beheld the scene of carnage and the figure which dominated it—Bristol, covered with the blood of his enemies and still gripping the rifle and bayonet which had served him so well.

"Some of your chaps funked it," the major sputtered, "but you seem to have done well enough with the rest."

"They all funked it," Bristol retorted.

The major stared. His eyebrows went up.

"*All* of them?" he repeated, the tail of his glance including Ali Khan's rigid back.

"All of them, sir," Bristol replied. "Havildar Ali Khan changed his mind, however, and—er—induced some of the others to change theirs. They got back here just in time."

The major looked around at the dead bodies.

"And you did all this killing yourself?" he said, not without envy. "By God, you had a busy quarter-of-an-hour, old chap! Well, come along. The convoy's passed, and the colonel will be wanting your report. He's nervous this morning. Gad! *What* a fight this must have been."

The colonel seemed to be impressed by the major's account of what he had seen in the Bulahr Pass, for no sooner had the convoy reached the column to which

it belonged than he took Bristol straight to the general in command and made a full report of the circumstances.

"Very well done, Mr. Bristol," said the general gruffly, eying Bristol with keen gray eyes. "Very well done indeed. But what's this about a havildar of the Shikaris running away? Doesn't seem possible, y' know."

"It happened, sir," Bristol answered curtly.

"Hm. Ha. Most unusual."

The general was still incredulous. Then his soldierly mind lighted upon the true explanation. The one chance, of course. Rally the blighters—

Carefully he explained this to Bristol.

Bristol flushed, recognizing the truth of the general's words. He ought to have seen for himself why Ali Khan had acted as he had.

The general, observing that red tide of shame, smiled reassuringly.

"No great matter," said he. "We all make mistakes when we're new to India. When I think of some of the things I did when I was a subaltern—Hm. Ha. I'm going to recommend you for your brevet as captain, Mr. Bristol. Do you more good now than the D. S. O. You're young for that yet."

"Thank you, sir," said Bristol. And in the manner of his thanks there was a subtle hint of dissatisfaction which the general, wise in the ways of young officers, was quick to catch.

"Of course if you'd *rather* have the D. S. O.," he said somewhat stiffly, "I will see what can be done. Thought the brevet would be—er—more acceptable. You look the ambitious sort."

"If you please, sir," said Bristol, risking Olympian thunders, "there's something I'd rather have than either."

"Eh? What, in heaven's name?"

"An appointment to the Shikaris, sir!"

"Eh? Eh?" The general's surprise was both genuine and apparent. "God bless my soul! You *are* ambitious!" he added. He had wanted to serve with the Shikaris himself, once; and the boon had been denied him. Still he was a major-general now, and his word carried weight at Simla.

"Hm. Ha." His eyes raked Bristol from head to foot. "Well, they'll either make you or kill you," he went on. "You'll have some of the rough edges rubbed off you in that crowd, Bristol. You've earned the right to ask favors. Mind you, I'm promising nothing; but I'll see what I can do."

CHAPTER III

FRONTAL ATTACK

IT WAS the proudest moment of Bristol's life.

And yet, somehow, there was a cloud over his soul.

Standing very erect beneath the sun-drenched tent-fly, he saluted the colonel of the Shakaris and spoke magic words, words that he had said over and over to himself longingly so very often:

"Sir, Lieutenant Thomas Bristol reports for duty with the Shikaris."

The colonel held out his hand; but even in the act of greeting he was grudging.

"For temporary duty, Mr. Bristol; for temporary duty," he corrected.

The colonel was a tall, cadaverous officer, with sunken cheeks and the coarse skin of one who has been in India too long; a face which accentuated the blazing fierceness of his blue eyes.

Behind him stood, like a court of high judgment, the senior major, the four company commanders, and the adjutant; and a little to one side, the ranking native officer, Subadar-Major Ranjit Singh, a stately Sikh whose expression was not exactly one of approval as he looked at the new *sahib*.

"You are the Bristol who was mentioned in dispatches for the affair at Bulahr Kotal?" the colonel asked.

"Yes, sir," said Bristol pridefully.

The officers looked at one another. Visibly they stiffened. Ranjit Singh's mustache seemed to bristle more fiercely above his tremendous beard.

"Quite so, quite so," murmured the colonel. "Very glad to have you with us, Mr. Bristol. You'll be assigned to C Company—the Pathan company—only vacancy we have for a subaltern. This is your company commander, Captain Clegg."

Captain Clegg, young, keen-looking, wooden-faced, came forward and shook Bristol by the hand; he was introduced to the other officers. He offered his hand to Ranjit Singh, but the Subadar-Major contented himself with a salute.

The adjutant suggested taking Bristol along to the mess-tent, but even in that hospitable gesture there was a suggestion of insincerity, a hint that the adjutant was merely being a very good adjutant —which is to say, a diplomat of no mean order.

The group of officers moved off, save Clegg, who lingered for a word with the colonel.

Bristol had been blessed—or cursed—with exceptionally sharp hearing. He could not help catching part of Clegg's low-voiced but impassioned protest:

"Insult to the honor of my company, sir. Every man feels it. Ruinous for discipline. I'd far rather do without a subaltern than have this—"

So that was the way the Shikaris felt about him, was it?

Angry pride rose up in Bristol and took possession of him, body and soul. He'd show them. He'd show them—

At evening parade he saw his men for the first time. C Company—the Pathan company—stared at their new lieutenant with resentful eyes; all save Havildar Ali Khan, on the right of the leading platoon, who kept his gaze straight to the front.

Clegg being orderly officer, Bristol was commanding the company.

Two hundred of the finest fighting men in India—lean, hard-muscled fellows, very soldierly and workmanlike in their loose khaki and pointed turbans—that was C Company of the Shikaris.

They moved at his words of command like well-oiled automatons, and yet they lacked that quick readiness, that touch of extra, enthusiastic smartness which the other companies gave to their beloved *sahibs*.

Bristol, his pride and his anger hardening as he sensed their feeling toward him, resolved to show them, too. Make or break, was it? Very well. C Company might not love him; but by God, C Company would jump when he spoke, or he'd know the reason why!

For all his pride and his anger, however, Bristol didn't funk the one hard thing that must be done at once.

Parade dismissed, he strode straight up to Havildar Ali Khan.

The native sergeant stood at attention, heels together, head up, eyes looking through rather than at his officer.

"Havildar," said Bristol, "I owe you a profound apology. I understand now the reasons for your conduct at the Bulahr Pass. You were perfectly right, and I was wrong. I ask your forgiveness for my unjust words. You are a brave man and a good soldier."

"Lieutenant Sahib," replied Ali Khan stonily, "I do not need your testimony to prove my courage. I am a havildar of the Shikaris."

There spoke a fierce pride equal to Bristol's own.

"Very well, havildar," answered Bristol, keeping his voice calm with an effort. "I have offered you what amends I can for my error. There is no more to be said."

He returned Ali Khan's salute and turned away, conscious that several of the men were lingering within earshot,

conscious above all of the hatred that glared in Ali Khan's dark eyes.

It was not a promising beginning, this start of Bristol's with the Shikaris. He did not enjoy his first mess-dinner, either. Every officer seemed to resent as a personal insult his treatment of Ali Khan. They made him feel their resentment in all the subtle ways in which a mess can make a newcomer uncomfortable.

Bristol was glad to escape from the big mess-marquee into the dark silence of the Indian night.

He looked up toward the Hills. The regiment was marching tomorrow; marching again into the Yakka Khel country, from which the previous expedition had been withdrawn only to have insurrection flare out again, in murder and rapine and caravan-raiding, all through the grim mountains which the Yakka Khel called their own. This time the job was to be done properly. Two columns, advancing through parallel gorges into the heart of the Hills, were to reduce the Yakka Khel to utter submission and impress upon this turbulent generation, at least, a sense of the irresistible power of the British Raj.

Active service! Bristol's soldier heart warmed within him. He'd have his chance. The Shikaris should see of what tempered steel their new officer was forged.

WITH dawn, the column of which the Shikaris were a part marched out from the camp, leaving behind all such luxuries as mess-tables and marquees. They pushed on steadily into the Hills, ignoring an occasional sniper's shot from the dark heights; they camped that night well into the Yakka Khel country, pushed on in the cool hours of the next morning.

Far ahead, a scattering of rifle-shots began, increased ominously.

A staff officer came cantering down the column, risking his horse's knees and his own neck over the stony way.

C Company was leading the Shikaris that morning. Bristol heard the staff officer's words to the colonel:

"The advance-guard's run into a hornet's nest, sir. The general desires you to bring the Shikaris forward and clear the way."

A murmur of delight ran from four to four all down the regimental column. The Shikaris quickened their pace at the major's order, as the colonel rode on to view the enemy's position.

It was, Bristol found when he came in sight of it, a position of terrible simplicity. At this point the gorge, up which the column had been advancing, fell away and the ground became more open. Straight ahead, a series of three small rocky hills, connected by low ridges, barred the British path. The crests of these hills were thick with the flashing spears and flaunting green banners of the tribesmen. The river which flowed down the gorge divided itself into two branches, sweeping round on either side of the hills and losing itself in impassable salt-marshes. There was, therefore, no possibility of maneuver, no envelopment, no turning movement.

The one solution was an attack straight to the front, up the forward slope of the hills, with little cover for the attackers.

"The longer we look at it, the less we shall like it," said the colonel of the Shikaris to his officers. "C Company will assault the center hill; A Company the right; B the left. D Company will remain in support under my control. The center company will direct. Move out, gentlemen."

They were not waiting for the artillery; it would have taken two hours to get the mountain battery to the front through the crowded gorge, and two hours was too long to wait, with the

tribesmen growing stronger and more confident with every passing minute.

"I'll take the leading platoons in advance," said Captain Clegg to Bristol. "You bring on the others as support."

Clegg's orders rang out; the two platoons deployed from column into line, pushed forward to the bottom of the hill under a distant and ineffective fire, lay down. Behind them the remaining two platoons deployed also and lay down. The companies which were to assault the flank hills swung out to right and left. Bayonets were fixed.

The company commanders looked toward the colonel, a signal flag flickered in the sunlight. Whistles sounded; hoarse voices shouted:

"Forward, the Shikaris!"

The assaulting line leaped to their feet and started up the hill.

Bristol glanced right and left at the jemadars who commanded his platoons. His whistle snapped to his lips, blew its commanding blast. His right arm went up and out, signaling.

His platoons rose, went forward at the double in a long extended line, some three hundred yards behind the assaulting platoons.

So far all had gone like clock-work, like a field day at Rawalpindi.

But now the clock-work effect was dissipated. Bullets sang their whining deathsong. In the assaulting lines, men were already falling. One of Bristol's jemadars whirled round twice and went stumbling down the hill in a long running fall. Havildar Ali Khan leaped to the front, taking command of the platoon.

"Forrrrrd, Shi-kari!" rang his voice, clear and confident above the clatter of rifle and *jezail* on the hilltop.

The assaulting line took cover in a slight irregular depression, opened a terrific fire with Lewis guns and rifles. The enemy's fire slackened. The assaulting platoons went forward again, the supports now closer behind them.

The whine of the enemy bullets took on a new and ominous sound, a vicious *buzzzzz*—the Shikaris were coming within range of the *jezails*, the big muzzle-loading smoothbores which carry a slug that will open a six-inch hole in a man's body.

The support platoons were now passing over ground littered with the wounded and dead of the platoon in front. But no one could stop to help them. The stretcher-bearers were somewhere behind—fighting men must advance.

Over the heads of advancing troops, the machine-guns of the regiment were laying down barrage-fire along the front of the enemy's position. Again the fire of the foe died down. The Shikaris pressed on, losing men with every yard, but advancing relentlessly.

Bristol's heart thrilled with a surge of pride. These were men—fighting men! He had never realized before—

What was this?

Directly in front of him, he saw a soldier of the assaulting line tumble back, fall. Another fell out, dropping his rifle, knelt by his wounded comrade, started to lift him from the ground.

Skulking—must be made an example of—

Bristol dashed forward.

"Get on there, you!" he yelled at the kneeling man, and emphasized his order with a hearty kick.

The man pitched forward on his face, struggled to his feet, whirled, his features contorted with rage. From inside his loose blouse he whipped out a curved knife and sprang at Bristol, screaming madly.

Behind, somebody shouted.

Bristol's Webley flashed up—his finger was tightening on the trigger, when his arm was knocked aside just as another

man dashed past him and tripped the knife-wielder neatly.

The revolver roared, but the bullet soared off into the eye of the sun.

The man with the knife was on his knees; a naik was wrenching the weapon from his hand, cursing him in three dialects for a hotheaded fool.

Bristol spun around to see who had knocked up his pistol-arm—and looked straight into the eyes of Havildar Ali Khan.

"That is not the way to handle Pathans, *sahib*," said the Havildar grimly. "Nor is this the moment to incite a mutiny."

A jezail-slug ripped his shoulder-strap as he spoke.

"I'll deal with *you* later," Bristol promised, and lunged forward up the hill. Behind him, yelling now with a fury which was as much directed against their officers as against the enemy, came his men.

The machine-gun fire ceased; the assaulting line was too close to crest. Relieved of the searching barrage, the enemy took heart. The crest became black with men. A perfect hell of fire burst out, almost in the faces of the assailants. Bristol saw Clegg go down; again he increased his own speed to a run.

The Shikaris checked their advance. Their captain was gone; their ranks were swept by a pitiless bullet-storm,

Then they became aware of a tall British officer who dashed through the wavering lines of the forward platoons and went on up the hill, alone, shouting:

"Forward, Shikaris! Follow me!"

It was Bristol. He never looked back to see if he were obeyed. He charged on—alone—knowing that every man in the company hated him, knowing that he had no claim on their loyalty.

"Follow me, Shikaris!"

Never had the Shikaris been false to that cry. Nor were they now. Havildars and naiks leaped to the front, yelling commands at their broken sections. Assaulting and support lines mixed all together, C Company of the Shakiris surged up that short remaining slope in a steel-tipped mass and flung themselves upon an astounded and disheartened foe.

They swept the tribesmen from the hilltop, pursued them with bitter and well-directed fire as they broke and fled down the rocky gorges beyond or scattered into the forbidding heights on either side.

Bristol, bleeding from three sword-cuts and a bullet-graze, dashed here and there, reorganizing platoons and sections, directing the pursuing fire, checking those enthusiasts who would have pursued on foot.

He saw that the flank companies, too, had carried their positions.

Triumph held his head high. He had lived to command a company of the Shikaris in a successful assault.

He saw the support company advancing in platoon columns up the slope on which the stretcher-bearers were already at work. At its head strode the colonel.

A battalion of Punjabi infantry was pushing into the pass between the hills. The column was advancing again; the Shikaris had cleared the way.

Two men carried the dead Clegg into the shade of a rock. Others clustered round him, now that the fight was over.

There were tears in their hard eyes; tears for their captain.

And somehow Bristol knew well that if he had lain there dead, there would have been no tears, no gathering to pay the last sad respects to "one of our *sahibs*."

Very well, be it so. But still they had obeyed him, they had followed him. They should learn, these grim Pathans, that Thomas Bristol was not a man to be trifled with.

IT WAS in this mood that he greeted the colonel as that war-torn veteran reached the crest at the head of the support company.

"Well done, C Company!" were his first words. "What's this? Poor Clegg gone? My best company commander! Mr. Bristol, you did very well in your first action with the regiment—thought for a moment there was going to be trouble when Clegg went down. Watching through my glasses, you know. Gave me a turn—but there, I needn't have worried. Not with the Shikaris. Get your company together, Mr. Bristol. We're to re-form, and fall in at the tail of the column. We've done our day's work."

That night, in bivouac far up in the Hills, three men stood before the colonel by the flickering light of a watch-fire.

Lieutenant Thomas Bristol; Havildar Ali Khan; and a Pathan recruit, Mohammed Huk.

"This man," said Bristol coldly, pointing to Mohammed Huk, "was in the act of lifting a wounded soldier to carry him from the field. I kicked him forward—no time for half-measures. He drew a knife and attacked me. As I was about to shoot him down in pursuance of my duty, Havildar Ali Khan knocked my gun aside. A naik of my platoon tripped Mohammed Huk, which is all that saved my life. I charge Sepoy Mohammed Huk with cowardice in the face of the enemy, and Havildar Ali Khan with assaulting and interfering with his superior officer whilst on active service."

The colonel's face was weary; the officers assembled behind him gave vent to stifled profanity.

"Mohammed Huk," the colonel spoke in a grating tone, "what have you to say?"

"He was my blood-brother. I saw him fall. Was I to leave him there to die, Karnal Sahib? Then this *sahib* kicked me—and I have never learned to take kicks meekly." The fierce young Pathan face turned toward Bristol. "The insult of that kick, and the slur upon my honor, I will wipe out in blood before I die," he snarled. "I swear it by the ninety-nine sacred names of Allah! May jackals defile my father's grave if I fail!"

"Send him to the rear under guard, Captain Fellowes," said the colonel to the adjutant, still more wearily. "I'll consider what action to take in his case when the campaign is over. Can't have him with the regiment now. More trouble."

He looked at Bristol, not pleasantly, as the escort came forward for the sullen Mohammed Huk.

"Havildar Ali Khan, what have you to say?" he asked.

"Nothing, Karnal Sahib," came the instant reply.

"Did you order that naik to jump forward and trip Mohammed Huk?"

"Yes, Karnal Sahib."

"So that you might knock Bristol Sahib's pistol aside without endangering his life?"

"Such was my purpose, Karnal Sahib."

"You feared that the men might not stand the strain of seeing one of their comrades shot down by Bristol Sahib?"

"That was in my mind, Karnal Sahib."

"As I thought. Nevertheless—" the colonel's tone was now one of warm approval, belying the official precision of his words— "you will understand that it is wrong to interfere with your officer on the battlefield. Admonished. That will do, Havildar."

Ali Khan flicked one look at Bristol's flaming countenance, saluted, executed a smart about-face and marched away.

"Mr. Bristol," said the colonel, "I'm afraid you have too much to learn—or rather to unlearn—to make you a useful officer for this regiment. Mohammed Huk is a young soldier. He

is still more Pathan than disciplined sepoy. A Pathan who sees his blood-brother fall, and fails to go to his help, is an outcast and his name is a byword amongst his people. Mohammed Huk has not yet had time to learn that he cannot yield to such perfectly natural impulses as a soldier. Such conduct should be treated with sympathetic firmness, not with kicks. The men of the Shikaris, Mr. Bristol, are not to be disciplined in such a manner."

"I did not understand, sir," said Bristol, sick at heart. "I—I tried to do my duty."

"I know that," the colonel answered very gravely. "I am recommending you for your brevet as captain for your gallantry in the attack. You are an excellent soldier and an excellent officer, Mr. Bristol—for some other regiment. But your ways are not the ways of the Shikaris. As you say, you do not understand them; neither do they understand you. When this campaign is over, I would suggest that you apply for transfer. Your application will have my prompt approval. Good night, Mr. Bristol."

That night, Sepoy Mohammed Huk—evading the sentries—deserted to the enemy.

CHAPTER IV

COMMUNICATING PATROL

THE Yakka Khel were retreating farther and farther into the hills, and an ugly rumor was filtering through the column. It was said that Mahrukzai, hitherto peaceful, had been roused by their mullahs and were joining the rebels with their thousands of fighting men.

The column pressed steadily on, brushing away such sporadic resistance as was offered; but in the hearts of officers and men, unaccountably but definitely, grew the feeling that they were being lured into a trap.

Bristol felt it with the others. And like the others, he told himself it was nonsense. A big trap, indeed, it would have to be to ensnare the Shikaris, a Punjabi battalion and one of the tough little Ghurkas, with a mountain battery and a company of sappers. Quite a commodious trap, and well provided with teeth.

Bristol had his own troubles. Three times in one day, sniping bullets whined uncomfortably close as he rode along with the regimental staff. For he had been relieved of the command of C Company and assigned as regimental intelligence officer—the reason for which change was not difficult to understand.

This sniping, Subadar-Major Ranjit Singh assured him, was the work of the renegade Mohammed Huk, who sought thus to make his honor clean. Of Huk or his friends and relatives; for Huk, too, was a Yakka Khel.

Early the following morning, as the bivouac was breaking up into march order, the colonel sent for Bristol.

"We've heard nothing from the other column, Mr. Bristol," said he. "The general is worried about them. I'm directed to send a communicating patrol across to get in touch. It's a different country. Will you undertake the job? I think you're just the man for it."

"Certainly, sir. How many men shall I take?" Bristol was pleased at this mark of confidence.

"As few as possible, I should think a havildar and six men ought to be enough to beat off any small parties you may encounter; if you find the enemy in force, the whole column wouldn't be too many. Here is a map, and here are your orders. Take two days' rations. You'll start at once."

The colonel eyed him regretfully as he strode away. Fine young officer. Too bad he was not the right temperament for the Shikaris.

Bristol went straight to the Subadar-Major.

"Who's the havildar next for duty on the special-duty roster?" he asked.

The senior native officer consulted his little book. His bushy eyebrows arched.

"Havildar Ali Khan, C Company, *sahib*," he said tonelessly.

"Have him report to me at once, please, Subadar-Major," was Bristol's instant reply.

Somehow, he had known which sergeant would be "next for duty." He had had a hunch—and he wasn't shirking the issue. He wasn't afraid to go out on this patrol with Ali Khan. Not for all the gold of India would he have asked that grim Sikh to substitute another havildar.

Ali Khan came, wearing full field equipment; he executed the rifle salute, stood waiting.

"Select six good men, Ali Khan," Bristol told him. "Good shots, good scouts, men who know this part of the country. We're going out on patrol in ten minutes. Tell the quartermaster-havildar to issue two days' rations to each."

"Very good, Lieutenant Sahib." The havildar went off to obey.

Bristol occupied the intervening time in studying his map.

It was difficult country indeed; hills and dry watercourses and stony ravines, with mere goat-tracks in lieu of roads. Bristol noted with a queer throb of sardonic amusement that the best route over to the route which the other column was using lay through the Bulahr Pass.

"Ali Khan and I are going to revisit old scenes," he told himself.

When the patrol marched up to report, he was ready.

He inspected each man's equipment carefully, head to toe; indicated the formation to be adopted; told the patrol the general object to be accomplished, in case both Ali Khan and himself should fall by the wayside; and led them out of the camp and up into the Hills, self-contained and confident and efficient—

Outwardly, at least.

Ali Khan swung along by Bristol's side, his eyes on the terrain ahead. He spoke to his officer only when duty required; but twice Bristol caught the sergeant eyeing him sidewise, furtively.

All that long hot afternoon they saw no sign of any foe; or indeed any sign of human presence in all that desolate stony waste, save their own.

They toiled on, Bristol checking their progress by map and watch and compass, till at last they were laboring up the defile which led to the Pass of Bulahr.

"I will scout ahead, with the *sahib's* permission. A fine spot for an ambush," growled Ali Khan.

He went on with two men, leaving Bristol to follow with the others. When Bristol reached the pass, he found Ali Khan standing on the exact spot where Bristol had questioned his courage, an unreadable expression on his face.

There was no sign of the carnage that had been. The tribesmen had long since carried away their dead.

Bristol passed between the two great boulders which had been his fortification, halted, consulted his map.

"In another hour we should be in touch with the column, havildar," said he. "Sooner, if they have patrols out. Forward."

Ali Khan moved ahead without a word.

It was perhaps a half hour after that, that Bristol first heard the mutter of rifle fire far to his front. A mutter which, as the patrol advanced, grew into a steady rumble of sound.

"They're heavily engaged!" he exclaimed to Ali Khan. "We've got to move carefully. Don't want to run into a big party of tribesmen."

The patrol now advanced in a sort of leap-and-bound fashion.

Two men rushed forward over each

open space, gained cover, signaled all clear; then the others followed. A deep ravine afforded them cover for perhaps half-a-mile; then there was more open ground, interspersed by narrow, wickedly deep nullahs. And all the time the roar of firing grew and grew before them. The dull *thump* of mountain-guns joined in.

At last, hot and perspiring and thoroughly tired out, Bristol found himself crawling among loose stones on top of a flat hill—crawling forward to the edge of the hill, whence he could look down into the rocky valley beyond.

As he reached the edge, a grim panorama of mountain warfare spread out before his eyes.

Huddled in the valley beneath him were the pack-trains of the column, protected by a small guard. Out in front of the animals, a Sikh battalion was lying down in close formation, evidently in reserve. Little khaki dots — British troops, the 3rd West Devons—were working their way slowly up the sloping ground to the westward, and to their right others lay in groups, completely halted. Ghurkas, Bristol thought, knowing the composition of the column. A mountain battery was firing slowly from the flat ground in front of the Sikhs.

All round the west and north sides of the valley, in a great semi-circle, were high hills, and these hills were swarming with vast masses of tribesmen. Thousands of them. Their banners waved triumphantly in the sun—for it must have seemed to them that victory was in their grasp. They outnumbered the little British force by ten to one.

"The Mahrukzai!" muttered Ali Khan, looking at the banners. "This is a bad thing we are seeing, *sahib*."

Bristol was looking down the hill. There was plenty of cover there; but there were also plenty of tribesmen, working along the hillside, firing down at the animals and the Sikhs and the gunners.

"No chance to get through," was his judgment. He drew from his pocket a small mirror. "We'll try another trick first."

He began flashing the mirror in the sun, his eyes on the group of officers between the Sikhs and the battery which he presumed to be the General and his staff.

Presently he saw a couple of men come running with a tripod and set it up. There came a bright answering flash—a heliograph.

Clumsily, with his hand mirror, Bristol reported himself at a patrol from General Allardyce's column.

The answer was prompt in coming:

"Get back to your column; urge General Allardyce to push on with all speed by the gorge of Khursand River, and take these tribesmen in the rear. Our ammunition is running short and we will be surrounded before nightfall. We must have relief by morning."

"Orders received and will be carried out," Bristol flashed back, all too aware that the signaling had attracted the attention of several parties of tribesmen, who were starting up the hill from various directions.

"Fall back quickly!" was his order, and the patrol retired at a crouching run amongst the stones, down the farther slope, across open ground and so into the comparative shelter of the ravine.

"Our return journey, *sahib*," warned Ali Khan, "will not be as pleasant as our coming hither. These Mahrukzai know every path in the Hills, and they will cut off our retreat."

A rifle cracked from the top of the ravine, as though to emphasize his words. A sepoy went down, shot through the head.

"Take his rifle-bolt and ammunition, one of you," Bristol commanded. "Forward!"

No time for sentiment now. The fate of two thousand men depended on that message getting to General Allardyce.

As he hurried along, he repeated the heliograph message to every man of the patrol, drilled each till he could repeat it word for word.

"My orders are, push on—whatever happens, whoever falls. One of us must get through. Stop for nothing. The fallen must lie where they drop—with a bullet through their heads if they prefer, to save them from torture."

Despite himself Ali Khan nodded grim approval of these words. The *sahib* knew a soldier's duty.

They reached the end of the ravine without further incident.

BUT as they emerged, Bristol saw a party of tribesmen dodging among the rocks on the open ground. He took his patrol across by rushes, amid a dropping fire from both sides. Two more men had gone down by the time he reached shelter; one dead, the other shot through the stomach—and he begged for his rifle and a cartridge before they took the belt. Ali Khan gave it to him. A shot—and Ali Khan came running on, tucking the bolt into his belt. Three men left now, besides Ali Khan and Bristol.

The Pass of Bulahr was ahead.

"We can beat them back at the pass, havildar," Bristol panted, dodging through the thin underbrush in a shallow nullah. "Kill a few, and the others may fall back."

A bullet whistled within an inch of his ear as he spoke; he heard the *thuck* as it bit home into the breast of a sepoy. Suddenly half-a-dozen tribesmen leaped down into the nullah fairly upon the patrol.

Bristol fired twice, saw a foe go down; he saw Ali Khan fighting like a devil incarnate in the middle of three howling Mahrukzai, parrying, thrusting, parrying again. A tribesman bounded over the rocks, slashing at Bristol. It took three pistol-bullets to stop him, the last shot in the Webley brought down a fellow who was springing on Ali Khan from behind. The others fled.

But they left both remaining sepoys behind them, dead on the pitiless stones. Bristol caught up two rifles, tore ammunition pouches from the dead—and ran for his life and his duty.

Ali Khan and Bristol together raced on for the Pass of Bulahr, bullets whining round them. The Mahrukzai, rallying, were close on their heels. They had been reinforced by another group, big fellows who charged up to the pass with a gallantry that could not be denied its meed of admiration.

Lying down behind the boulders in the pass, Ali Khan and Bristol fired steadily, carefully, picking their foes. Man after man fell; the attack faded away into the rocks on either hand.

A terrible silence fell upon the pass.

"Those last were of my own people, *sahib*," said Ali Khan. "They were Yakka Khel. I thought I saw that rascal Mohammed Huk among them."

"Damnation!" swore Bristol. "He'll keep 'em stirred up. My fault, Ali Khan. Here!" He scribbled hastily in his field message-book. "Take this and go on—quickly—before they can have time to climb the high ground on either side of the pass. I can hold 'em off; it'll take 'em an hour to scale those cliffs. With an hour's start, you should get through."

But Ali Khan shook his head, a queer smile twisting his mouth for a moment.

"With all respect, *sahib*, no," said he. "It is your duty to go and mine to stay. The general will have a thousand questions to ask about the situation of the other column. He will need an officer's answer to those questions."

It was true. Bristol realized that.

Yet he could not bring himself to accept this man's sacrifice.

"I can't have you do this for me, Ali Khan," he muttered.

"For you, *sahib*!" A world of wonder-scorn rang in the havildar's voice. "I

would not do it for you. I do it for the Sirkar, whose salt I have eaten!"

A hot flush rose to Bristol's face.

"It is a plain question of duty, *sahib!*" Ali Khan insisted. "This is no moment for chivalry. Go quickly, then, while yet there is time."

Still Bristol hesitated.

"Moreover, *sahib,*" said Ali Khan, observing this reluctance, "if I went and you stayed, you would stay to die—quickly by a bullet, or slowly beneath torturer's knives. But if I stay, and am taken, I will be taken by my own people. They will not slay me, at least. Why, some of the men out there are from my own village; my cousins, my kin. Listen. I will prove it."

He lifted his voice and called out; was answered instantly from a group of rocks well along the pass.

There was some calling back and forth thereafter; Bristol, knowing no Pushtu, was yet able to understand that names were being exchanged.

"You see, *sahib?*" cried Ali Khan.

Bristol nodded. He saw; saw his duty plain before him, hard as it was. And his high opinion of Ali Khan had somehow faded a little; this was not so splendid a self-sacrifice as he had thought. There was no hesitation in his manner now.

"Very well, Ali Khan. I will go," he said. "Good-by and good luck."

He thrust out his hand; somehow Ali Khan failed to see it, turning at that moment to fire a warning shot at a tribesman who was trying to dodge across the pass.

Bristol crawled swiftly along, sheltered by the boulders, till he was out of sight of the tribesmen in the pass; then he rose to his feet and hurried onward, desperately tired, footsore—and somehow desperately miserable for all the sustaining thought of duty carried on to the bitter end.

The sun was well down the western sky when at last he found himself nearing his goal. He had not come through unopposed; half-a-dozen times snipers on the high ground had fired at him, but no bullet had touched him. The main pursuit was held back by Ali Khan beyond the Pass of Bulahr; these prowling fellows were mere bushwhackers, squibbing off their *jezails* and Martinis, hoping for the best.

He half slid, half fell down the last slope into the gorge where the column had passed. Transport was going forward under escort; a long line of ammunition mules, guarded by a few mounted sowars.

Bristol commandeered a horse, swung his aching limbs to saddle, rode on at speed. He did not have to go far.

He came upon the headquarters staff off-saddled in a grove of stunted pines. As he dismounted, an aide came running out to meet him, told him the column had halted a short distance ahead while reconnoitering patrols went out to scour the country for signs of the Mahrukzai.

"They won't find 'em," growled Bristol. "I know where the Mahrukzai are."

He went on to where General Allardyce, surrounded by the commanders of units and the staff, was holding a council of war.

"Mr. Bristol! You reached the other column?"

The general's eyes were eager.

"By heliograph only, sir." Bristol swiftly delivered the message. The officers were crowding round him excitedly, by the time he'd finished.

"So that's where the rascals went!"

Bristol was required to give a full description of the position of the other column, and to make a sketch illustrating his report, while orderlies and aides galloped off to get the column on the move.

"We're pushing on, gentlemen! Night march if necessary!" was the general's order, for when Bristol had finished it was plain that the other column was in

sore straits. "Mr. Bristol, your services will not be forgotten."

The colonel of the Shikaris drew Bristol a little aside as the general mounted to ride away.

"Your patrol, Mr. Bristol?" he asked anxiously. He was ever thinking of his men, being that sort of colonel.

"All gone. Killed on the return journey — except possibly Havildar Ali Khan." Bristol told the colonel in quick, clipped words what had happened to Ali Khan.

The colonel looked at him with an unfathomable expression in his eyes. Somehow he seemed to shrink away a little.

"To think," said he, "that I should have lived to see the day when an officer of the Shikaris abandoned— No. Forgive me, Bristol. That's not fair. You did your duty, according to your lights, and I daresay nine officers out of ten would approve your conduct. It's just that in the Shikaris we don't—er—our traditions— Oh, dammit, come along. We've got to get back to the regiment. But poor old Ali Khan—"

The colonel's foot was in the stirrup.

"Ali Khan's all right," Bristol defended himself angrily. "Told me so himself. His own people out there—Yakka Khel. They won't kill him."

The colonel stared.

"What Ali Khan told you," he said bitterly, "was a generous, self-sacrificing lie. A lie to induce you to go and leave him. He knew you ought to—in a sense. Not kill him? You don't know these people, Mr. Bristol. They have a little habit of dealing with their own kinsmen taken in arms against them, as traitors to the tribe. And that means death by stoning. A horrid way to die, Bristol. I've seen the results—once."

He swung to the saddle.

"Come along," he snapped.

Bristol stood still, transfixed by horror, frozen by shame.

"By God, sir," he said suddenly, "I'm going back."

"Back? Back where?"

"To Ali Khan, sir."

"Don't be a young ass, Bristol. You can't do him any good."

But Bristol's shame was not a thing which could be reasoned with.

He mounted his troop horse; it would bear him part of the way.

"I'm going, sir," he insisted. "You don't need me with the regiment. I'm no good to you. I'm going back to get Ali Khan!"

"You'll only die with him, Bristol." Yet somehow the colonel's eyes were glowing.

"Better die with him, sir, than live with myself, way I feel now," was Bristol's bitter retort.

He swung his horse round, drove heels into its ribs, and was gone, ears closed to the colonel's shouted order.

CHAPTER V

COUNTER-ATTACK

DUSK was closing down upon the Hills when at last Bristol saw looming dark before him the heights which guarded the Pass of Bulahr.

He had taken the horse as far as he could, then abandoned the animal, and gone on afoot. He had the sowar's rifle, which had been strapped to the saddle, and he had commandeered three bandoliers of ammunition and a filled water-bottle.

As he plodded onward, he listened for sounds of firing, but heard none. He did not know whether this was a good omen or a bad one. It might mean that Ali Khan had been rushed and overpowered; it might mean simply that the enemy was holding off, waiting perhaps for darkness.

He worked his way up the gorge to-

ward the pass, taking all precautions. Which was as well—

For, when he came in sight of the pass itself, it was by no means unoccupied. There were a dozen men there, standing in a wide circle, and one in the midst, on his knees, bound apparently but with head held high in arrogant defiance.

Ali Khan. Even in the poor light, Bristol knew that proud bearing.

Derisive cries floated to his ears. One of the men in the circle lifted his hands above his head, something between them —a great jagged lump of stone. He held it so in a last delightful moment of savage anticipation.

Already Bristol had understood. Four hundred yards, he thought. And the light was poor. But he was on one knee behind a small boulder, his rifle rested across it, his eye aligning the sights.

He held his breath, forcing himself to the patient deadly squeeze of the trigger.

The rifle cracked. The man with the stone flung out his arms and crumpled in a heap, his own stone falling upon him as he collapsed.

Instantly Bristol shifted his aim, fired two more quick snapshots as fast as he could work the bolt, saw another man go down.

He snatched up a handful of pebbles and flung them clattering against the side of the gorge, where fortunately they started a small rock-slide which added to the din. The wicked reports of his rifle were still reverberating between those high walls.

"Forward, Shikaris!" roared Bristol, and charged up the gorge, firing as he came.

The tribesmen had heard that shouted command all too often, to their cost.

They stayed not to reason why, but fled, leaving their dead behind.

Bristol dashed past the bound Ali Khan, flung himself prone between the great boulders which guarded the pass, brought one lagging fugitive down with the last shot in his clip, hastily reloaded and fired five more shots into the gloom for sheer moral effect.

"That ought to hold 'em for a while," he muttered, turning to cut the cruel bonds which were cutting into Ali Khan's wrists and ankles.

"Here—what's this? Blood?" he demanded suddenly. "Got you in the leg, the devils!"

"The leg is broken, *sahib*. That is how it happened that they were able to capture me," Ali Khan answered gravely. "But that does not matter. Why are you here, *sahib*? Were there too many snipers in the Hills, that you could not get through?"

Ali Khan was single-minded in the matter of duty.

"Better let me tie up this leg," Bristol answered. "And don't worry, Ali Khan. I got through all right, delivered the message to the general, and the column is pushing on, should be crossing the Khurgand by now. Everything's all right."

"But—but—" Ali Khan's dark eyes held Bristol's compellingly, a look of vast wonder—and something else—dawning in their depths. "But then—why are you here, *sahib*?"

"Came back for you," grunted Bristol, busy with first-aid kit.

"For me! You came back for me—alone!" breathed Ali Khan, and was silent for a little while. Bristol finished bandaging the nasty wound the jezail bullet had left.

"Take off your bayonet scabbard and I'll try to fix a splint now," he ordered.

In silence Ali Khan obeyed.

Bristol made a rough and ready job of the leg, using the discarded puttee to bind all tight.

Ali Khan sat still, not wincing once.

"There," said Bristol at last. "Not pretty, but it'll do till we can get you to a doctor."

"*Sahib*," said Ali Khan in a low voice,

"let us not delude ourselves with pretty tales. We are not children. It is in my mind that I shall never see a doctor again. Nor you, since you could not get back to the column at night in this country. You have come here to die, *sahib.*"

"Maybe I have, maybe not," chuckled Bristol, feeling somehow quite lighthearted about it. "At least I'm dying in good company—and not unattended by certain of the Sirkar's enemies!"

"*Shabash, sahib!*" exclaimed Ali Khan. "That was well spoken. You are a brave man, and the Shikaris should be proud of you this day! As I am! Will—will you take my hand—in friendship, *sahib,* as comrades who are about to die together for the salt they have eaten and the honor of the regiment?"

He thrust out a brown hand—Bristol gripped it hard.

"What a fool I was ever to doubt *your* courage, Ali Khan!" he muttered.

"Nay, what a fool I was not to understand that you spoke in haste," Ali Khan replied instantly. "A proud fool, too proud to explain. *Wallah!* What a child a man can be!"

"No more of that," grinned Bristol. "Let's consider what we can do to make life unpleasant for our friends out yonder. Are there any of them up on the heights?"

"No. They did not take that trouble, after a lucky shot wounded me."

"All the better. They can't scale those rocks in the night. We've only to consider them stalking us, up the pass. And I think we can deal with any such attempts—until dawn."

"Until dawn," agreed Ali Khan. "After which they will climb, and attack us from above. And we shall die. But the manner of our death, *sahib,* shall be told to recruits in the regiment for generations to come, that they may be inspired to serve the Sirkar likewise!"

"We'll make your gallant kinsmen pay for us," Bristol answered. "Well, we've water and food enough. Let's eat."

By the time they had finished their frugal meal, night had enfolded the Hills.

Out in the pass was silence.

"Maybe they've had enough. Maybe they've gone," Bristol suggested after a while.

"Not while Mohammed Huk is with them," Ali Khan answered. "He recognized you; I heard him cry out your name. He will tell them how they were made fools of by one man, and will urge them to wipe out that shame, lest the women laugh at them from the roofs when they go home."

There was a long pause.

"You think if Mohammed Huk were not there, with his blood-feud against me, the rest might go?" Bristol asked finally.

"Undoubtedly, *sahib.* They have lost men enough here, and moreover, this pass will have become a place of ill-omen since the *sahib* dealt with the Ghazis between these boulders."

Bristol nodded to himself in the darkness. Again it was his damn-fool mistakes that were dogging him.

He'd envisaged a possible retreat in the night, a last-chance desperate business but with an outside possibility of getting through. Ali Khan's broken leg had scotched that hope. And now because Bristol had kicked a Pathan sepoy, they both must die. Somehow that didn't seem quite fair—to Ali Khan.

They took turns watching through the night. Time and again the one who slept would waken at the crack of the other's rifle, to find moving shadows in the gloom of the pass or hear the faint rattle of pebbles which never failed to betray the most stealthy assailant. Not once was an attempt made to push home a night attack; the Yakka Khel had had quite enough experience of the terrible effects of magazine-fire confined between narrow limits.

At last, dawn rimmed the eastern

gorge-wall with gray. Light stole down into the pass of Bulahr.

"Our last sunrise," thought Bristol.

"There is a Roll of Honor which hangs in the Karnal Sahib's office, and this day's work will inscribe our names thereon in letters of gold," said Ali Khan suddenly through the chill dawning.

The day came swiftly. There was little mist; they could see well along the pass. Dark figures darted from rock to rock.

The tribesmen were moving again to the attack.

The steady crack of rifles beat them back; they could not face that disciplined, accurate fire from concealed marksmen.

It was light enough now for Bristol to make out the lines of the regimental uniform on one of the attackers. That one would be Mohammed Huk, who sought to cleanse his Pathan honor in Bristol's blood.

A bullet ricocheted from a rock and ripped open Bristol's side. The warm blood soaked his tunic. There were no more bandages, but Ali Khan made shift to stanch the flow with strips torn from his shirt.

High on the west wall of the gorge, Bristol caught a glimpse of a climbing figure. He tried a quick shot; the man vanished behind a ledge. They were climbing, which meant the end.

He saw Mohammed Huk again, running—fired, and missed.

"Soon! It will be soon, dogs!" shrieked Mohammed Huk, safe behind a pile of fallen limestone.

Inspiration came in that moment to Bristol.

"Mohammed Huk!" he shouted.

"Aye, *sahib*-swine! I am here!" came the instant answer. "Would you beg for your life?"

"You have sworn to make your honor clean, Mohammed Huk! Stand out, then, and meet me with knives, foot to foot, and take my blood if you can! Like a man!" challenged Bristol loudly, in his best Urdu.

A chorus of approving shouts arose from among the rocks where the other tribesmen lurked.

There is nothing your Yakka Khel likes better than to watch a good knife-fight.

"*Sahib!*" warned Ali Khan sharply. "Be careful what you do! This Mohammed Huk is famous for his skill with the steel!"

"What trick is this?" Mohammed Huk was demanding.

"No trick at all. It is a challenge! You have boasted what you will do. Now prove your words or eat them and be known as Mohammed the Cur forever after!" yelled Bristol.

Laughter cackled from the rocks.

"Go on, Mohammed Huk! Carve the Angresi to cat's meat!" encouraged a loud voice. "We shall cover you with our rifles against treachery. Are you afraid of a *sahib* who knows not the knife?"

"I will fight you, Angresi!" yielded Mohammed Huk.

"It is well," answered Bristol. "But let this be agreed between us: If I win, we are to be left in peace. If I lose, do what you will with me, but Ali Khan is to be cared for and sent back to the British lines."

"No!" cried several voices.

"Then come on and take us—and see how many lives you lose in the taking!" was Bristol's unanswerable retort.

"That is true speaking!" yelled a tribesman—Ali Khan translating the Pushtu of these various cries for Bristol's benefit. There was more argument, some of it inaudible. Then:

"It shall be as you say!" Mohammed Huk called out. "It is agreed."

"They are lying, *sahib!* Do not do this thing," begged Ali Khan. But Bristol had made up his mind. It seemed the one chance; and if he lost, Ali Khan at least would have some hope of life.

He meant, however, to guard against treachery as well as he could.

"Give me your knife, Ali Khan," he requested. The sergeant handed over the blade; it was a good one, sharp and strong.

"Now lie here, covering me with your rifle. At the first sign of treachery, fire." He lifted his voice. "Stand out in the open, Mohammed Huk, with no weapon but your knife. You have my word you shall not be fired on if all play fair."

Instantly Mohammed Huk stepped out from behind his pile of stones. For the word of a British officer is a thing inviolable on the frontier.

He had stripped to the waist; his muscular body was a thing of beauty in the morning light. A knife glittered in his right hand.

"Now you are covered by Ali Khan's rifle," Bristol warned. "If any man fires at me when I show myself, you die!"

Mohammed Huk looked startled and yelled something to his friends in Pushtu at which Ali Khan chuckled grimly.

Bristol strode out into the pass.

The wound in his side was stiffening, but it was more painful than dangerous. The slight cuts he had sustained in the attack on the three hills bothered him little. The thin, chilly air was bracing. He felt supremely confident in his own powers.

So, apparently, did Mohammed Huk, for he laughed loudly at sight of the blood.

"Ho! Ho! This will be a merry jest! I will let more of your blood ere you die, dog! You shall die slowly, slowly, tasting my vengeance to the last!"

He came forward on the balls of his feet, treading lightly and warily; Bristol moved to meet him, eyes on eyes.

Suddenly Mohammed Huk darted in, crouching, knife-arm outstretched to slash for Bristol's belly.

Bristol leaped aside. He had to leap to the right because of loose treacherous stones the other way, and he was only able to drive down one awkward overhand slash at Mohammed Huk as the Pathan staggered past him. But even that one stroke laid a brown shoulder open in a long clean cut.

Mohammed Huk was round in a flash, charging. Bristol met him with a quick parry; they struggled together for a moment, bodies close in grim embrace, then Bristol tore himself away, and as he did so, felt Mohammed Huk's knife-point rip his left arm.

Blood for blood—

Bristol laughed, and with a quick toss shifted his knife to his left hand.

Mohammed Huk stared at this maneuver, cursed, and moved to the attack very warily indeed, not quite understanding how to defend himself against that left-hand blade and still drive his own attack home. This time it was Bristol who suddenly rushed. Parrying Mohammed Huk's desperate stab with his own blade, he drove a right hook for the Pathan's jaw which, had it landed fair, would have ended the contest then and there. But Mohammed Huk ducked his head; Bristol's fist smashed against the side of that head between ear and temple. The Pathan went down, sprawling.

For an instant he was at Bristol's mercy; but there was something in Bristol which could not kill a fallen foe. Instinct rather than conscious thought of mercy held him back. His right hand throbbed with sudden agony. Mohammed Huk scrambled to his feet, snarling.

"Fool!" he gasped out; his bloodshot eyes held no hint of yielding.

He crouched there, dragging in three great sobbing breaths; then he leaped, his blade stabbing straight for Bristol's throat.

Bristol sidestepped and swung that right fist again. It met Mohammed Huk's chin in full career. The slender Pathan whirled over and over twice

before he crashed down upon the stones and lay still.

At the smash of the blow, a white-hot stab of pain shot up the arm from Bristol's right hand. He *had* broken it, then.

But no matter. Mohammed Huk was conquered. He had won—won life for himself and for Ali Khan, his comrade.

He'd always held that a good boxer could make a fool out of any knife-fighter that ever swung a blade.

"Treachery, *s a h i b!* Treachery!" shrieked Ali Khan behind him.

Too late he saw the dark forms of the tribesmen darting out from the rocks, rifles in hand. Too late he heard their cries of triumph as their weapons covered him. Too late he realized that he himself, in the position where he stood, blocked the best part of Ali Khan's field of fire.

"Down with that knife, Angresi!" demanded a grinning Yakka Khel. "And you, Ali Khan—one shot and your *sahib* dies!"

Bristol, swaying on his feet from loss of blood, had yet no thought of surrender. He picked the nearest man, poised to launch himself for the rascal's throat —well aware that, though he died, Ali Khan's charged magazine would exact a bitter price for his death.

There was a strange roaring in his ears—the men in front of him appeared to be tumbling down—he tried with all his failing powers to understand the miracle—why, it was rifle-fire!

And he heard a voice of thunder shout:

"Forward, Shikaris! Leave not one dog alive to tell the tale!"

Past and around him surged khaki-clad figures; past and around him, and upon the tribesmen with bayonets that drove home with vengeful fury—

Shikaris! Men of his own regiment!

He found himself standing face to face with the tall, bearded Subadar-Major Ranjit Singh—yes, and there was the Pathan subadar of C Company—grinning at him, faces wreathed in delighted smiles as they beheld him alive and on his feet. He could not understand.

"Glad to see you—damned glad, Subadar-Major!" he said in a dry, hoarse voice. " 'Bout at our last gasp, we were. But how'd you get here?"

"The Karnal Sahib told how you had gone back alone to Ali Khan, *sahib,*" the big Sikh answered. "And so, when we had smitten those swine of Mahrukzai and taught them a sound lesson, we native officers begged leave to lead a patrol to find you. We asked especially that no British officer be sent. It was our task to rescue the *sahib* who risked so much for a comrade of the regiment; or at least to bring in his body, for we had little hope of finding you alive. Yet we deemed it a stain upon our honor to leave the body of one of our *sahibs* to the vultures of the Hills."

One of our *sahibs!* The senior native officer of the regiment had called him —one of our *sahibs!*

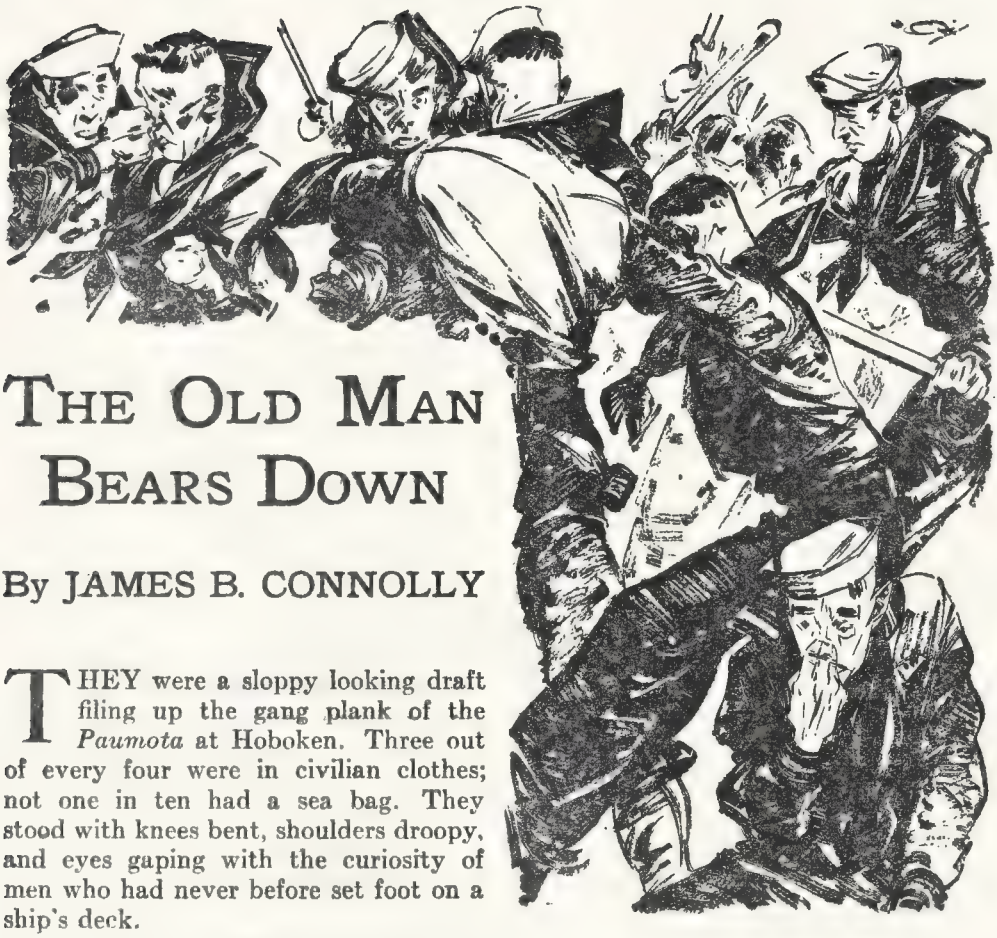
His hand went out, falteringly—the effort of lifting it was suddenly almost beyond him. He felt the Subadar-Major's firm brown fingers close upon it, heard as in a dream Ali Khan's delighted babble of praise, heard too the Pathan officer's thanks to Allah that they had found their *sahib* alive, that he might live to lead C Company in many battles.

One of our *sahibs!*

He had won his footing in the Shikaris —pain tore his body, but peace was in his heart. Peace—and a great joy.

He swayed farther—pitched forward to the ground in a dead faint.

Tenderly the men of the Shikaris picked up the limp form of their rescued officer, bound his wounds and bore him away through the Pass of Bulahr, toward the distant place where the regiment waited to receive with fitting honor one of its own, returned to it as from the dead.



The Old Man Bears Down

By JAMES B. CONNOLLY

THEY were a sloppy looking draft filing up the gang plank of the *Paumota* at Hoboken. Three out of every four were in civilian clothes; not one in ten had a sea bag. They stood with knees bent, shoulders droopy, and eyes gaping with the curiosity of men who had never before set foot on a ship's deck.

The Executive Officer, Mr. Harger, watched them file aboard. He lined them on the quarter deck, called the roll, stepped across the deck to the cabin, reported the new draft all present and ready for inspection.

"How they shape up?" asked the Old Man.

"They're pretty raw, sir, but I wouldn't say they're any worse than the draft we drew the last time back from France."

"That Norfolk draft? They couldn't be," said the Old Man. "No draft could be. Any service men among 'em?"

"One, sir, an old bosun's mate, and he looks as if he might like his grog pretty well."

"Most the old-timers do," said the Old Man. "But I like to see 'em around. They do know their duty, which is certainly a relief these days."

The Old Man was short, thickset, ruddy and blue-eyed, with crisp little reddish curls where his head wasn't bald. He stood up, reached for his cap, stepped to the airport for a preview of the new draft. One glance and then:

"Of all the lousy lookin' drafts! Of all the loose odds and ends— Look at that one, Harger, huggin' the carpet bag between his feet! I didn't know there was a carpet bag left in all the world. And that other one with the bunch of books under his arm! What is it drives some of 'em into the Navy?"

He sighed, jammed his cap hard down on what were left of his tight little curls, stepped out on deck, halted before the nearest man in the front rank.

"What's your name, son?"

"Battles, suh."

"Battles. How comes it you joined the navy and not the army?"

"No army for me, suh. No suh. My grandpappy fit in the Civil War, and when they drafted me he says: 'Don't you go jinin' no army now. Yo'-all do and you'll sleep in the mud, and you'll be most of the time lousy, and no knowin' when you'll get yo' vittles. Yo'-all jine the Navy and thar'll be hot vittles reg'-lar, and a dry place to sleep in nights and you won't be marchin' and marchin' till yo' laigs air wore out.' "

"Your grandpappy knew something, son." The Old Man looked down the front line. "Any of you men ever had sea service of any kind?"

Two hands were raised.

"Two out of sixty! Fine! Lovely!" He thrust an index finger at the nearer one of the two. "What was your sea service?"

"I was six months on a Fall River Line steamer."

"Mm. Six months on the raging waters of Long Island Sound! And you weren't frightened?"

"No, no, sir!"

"No? What was your job?"

"I was the barber, sir."

"Grrh!" said the Old Man. "And you other one— Where'd you sail from?"

"Out of Boston, sir."

"Good! A seafarer at last, Harger! What kind of a ship?"

"An excursion steamer. We took fishing parties down the harbor."

The Old Man made a sound like a man taking a blow in the stomach. He recovered.

"What was your billet—your job?"

"I was the cook's helper. I cooked the fish chowders the cook got all the credit for."

"What d' y' know! A break for the good ship *Paumota* here, Harger. Son, the ship's cook's striker was put ashore with the flu in Brest. You're the answer to his daily prayer."

"But I want to be a gunner, sir. I want to have a shot at a U-boat."

"I wouldn't mind having a shot at one myself, but the ship's galley for you, son. You'll like it there. When the deck force are wearing hip boots trying to keep warm and dry, you'll be paddling around in your bare feet, snug and comfortable in the ship's galley."

The Old Man moved on to the lad with the books under his arm.

"What's your name, son?"

"Morel, sir."

"Morel. What was your idea in putting in for Transport Service?"

"I wanted to get to France, and see Paris, sir—the boulevards and caffeys of Paris. I got a guide to Paris here, sir. This other book is 'The Three Musketeers.' "

"And a great story, son. But Paris! How did you expect to see Paris from a transport?"

"Why, sir, while the ship would be lying idle in those French ports I thought I would be running back and forth to Paris."

"And not a bad idea, son, not a bad idea. But who sold it to you?"

Morel glanced furtively back over his shoulder. The Old Man's eyes, trailing along, spotted the old boatswain's mate at the further end of the rear rank. "What's that old-timer's name, Harger?"

"The bosun's mate? Maloney, sir."

"Huh! Maloney!" grunted the Old Man. He stepped through the front rank. "You old rascal you!" he shouted. The Hoboken draft, fresh out of civil life and knowing nothing of the fondness of veteran naval officers for old shipmates of the enlisted force, gazed in astonishment at the sight of their captain and a boatswain's mate shaking hands warmly, and smiling at each other as they gossiped of other days and other ships.

"Ten years, Maloney, is it, since our last cruise together?"

"Eleven, captain. On the old *Kentucky*, and not a bad old battle wagon either for her day, sir."

"For her day, for her day. That low after-deck of hers did ship plenty of loose water in a following sea. But step over here out of hearing. Now then, what line o' fairy talk you been passin' out about Paris liberty? It's twelve to fifteen hours by express train from Biscayan ports to Paris, and we're usually about forty-eight hours in port when I get orders to head back home. All of which you know damn well. And now—speakin' as one old shipmate to another—what the hell was your idea in tellin' these innocent rookies that they will be commutin' to Paris and back between trips?"

"Now, captain dear," said Maloney, "you know me of old. Was I ever a man to destroy young men's illusions? Isn't most o' bein' happy thinkin' we're goin' to be? And now—speakin' as one old shipmate to another—how the hell do you know they won't some day make a Paris liberty?"

"How do I know? In the eight months I been ferrying across to France and back, not a single man of this ship's company has had a chance to make a Paris liberty. And if ever the ship is in port long enough for a Paris liberty, it won't be any new drafts who will make it."

"That will be a disappointment, captain, comin' from this ship and you."

"Why from me especially?"

"The *Paumota* has long been known as the easy ship, and you have the name of bein' the kindest, the most fatherly commander in the transport fleet."

"Fatherly! Huh! Guess I've been too damn fatherly. The easy ship! The easy boss! I got a hint of that before, Maloney. Well, I'm bearing down from now on. No more port liberty, no more sick bay for every stomach ache, no more anything for new drafts that they don't damn well earn. How long you been in the service now, Maloney?"

"Forty-odd years, sir."

"And you've seen plenty of new drafts coming over a ship's side in your time?"

"Hundreds, captain, hundreds."

"And among those hundreds of new drafts did you ever see the equal of this one? Look at 'em now, standing like they're waiting in line for a seat at a ball game. Look at 'em—their heads rolling around like a lot of rubbernecks on some sight-seeing bus. I heard one of 'em calling the smoke stack a chimney, and I'll wager some of 'em think the North River out there is the ocean."

"Plenty of 'em think so," admitted Maloney sorrowfully.

"Take a look at them again, Maloney—They look like what my wife brings home from a rummage sale—and answer me, as one old shipmate to another—aren't they the lousiest draft you ever saw? Aren't they—"

From inside the ship's house a bugler was sounding mess gear. The Old Man turned to the Executive:

"Mr. Harger, those men must be hungry. Dismiss 'em until after lunch. Half of 'em will probably go adrift down between decks and starve to death trying to find out where it is they're going to eat, but that's a chance they got to take—it's war-time. And Maloney!"

"Sir?"

"Your immediate duty will be to dry nurse the new draft across the Atlantic."

THE *Paumota* was a chartered passenger steamer. In her merchant life she usually carried two thousand tons or so of cargo on her upper freight deck. In her transport life that cargo deck space was taken over for troop quarters. Lacking that cargo ballast where it was needed to steady her, the *Paumota* bounced around like an empty corked bottle in a seaway. Her first trip across the Atlantic in convoy established her fame as the champion roller and diver of the transport service.

With what the crew at large called the Hoboken draft, the *Paumota* put to sea. Outside Sandy Hook she took a heavy beam under her quarter. Breasting Nantucket Lightship she was rolling fifty degrees. The Hoboken draft grabbed hold of solid attachments on her inclined decks and asked their Norfolk shipmates how much lower the ship would roll before she capsized? And the Norfolk draft, old sea-dogs of a month's standing, would come back soothingly with something like this:

"Call that rollin' low! Wait till she gets rollin' good! Why, when she gets rollin' right you'll see her put her smoke pipes under. I mean her chimneys. Have patience and wait!"

By and by she ran into a heavy head sea. She shifted from rolling her side under to pitching her head under. She was burying her forecastle head to the depth of a man's neck in solid water, if so be any foolish man had been out there to measure the depth of it. The Hoboken draft were not foolish in such matters.

"Won't she sink some time goin' down like that?" asked what were not yet laid away of the Hoboken draft.

"Probably," replied the nonchalant Norfolk draft. "But what the hell? It's war, ain't it?"

Two days of that rolling and pitching, and the Hoboken draft weren't caring whether the ship sunk or not. They knew that they were going to die anyway. The sick bay filled up with all who could crowd into it. The others wandered all over the ship, seeking a spot to die in. The angry aspect of the seas frightened them off the decks; and below decks indignant members of the Black Gang kept shooing them away, shouting:

"Go on up topside somewheres! Go on up to the ship's rail! Don't go dumpin' what you et back in Hoboken all over our nice clean compartments. Go on up."

One of the Hoboken draft—the others called him Dinty—had picked out a quiet passageway for himself; and he was stretched out there, bothering nobody, asking only to be allowed to die in peace, when one of the Norfolk draft, a big fellow they called Red, tripped over Dinty's feet in the passageway.

"You guys," said Red, "can't you go and pass out somewheres else besides in a gangway?"

Dinty raised his head from the deck, gazed up at Red: "I maybe ain't got long to live, but don't think you can talk like that to me, you big stiff, and get away with it. Only there's no ladder handy to climb up high enough, I'd hook you one in the jaw."

"Only I'm on watch," retorted Red, "and the Old Man would put me in the brig for forgettin' I'm on watch, I'd pick you up and slap you a few acrost your stern sheets."

The bad weather passed, the sea smoothed out, the Hoboken draft crawled out into the open spaces again. There were still things to try men's souls, as having to go inside and down three or four decks and find a passageway with a pale blue light whenever a fellow wanted to light a cigarette at night; but here were fine days again. The Hoboken draft began to assert themselves. Dinty halted big Red. "Remember me?" asked Dinty.

"No. Who are yuh?"

"When I was down and out you said you'd slap my stern sheets only you were on watch."

"Oh, you that guy? Well, you're sure lookin' a lot better."

"And I'm feelin' a lot better. When ain't you on watch?"

"I'm actin' Master-at-Arms," answered Red. "I'm always on watch."

"That's as good an alibi as any other, I s'pose."

"You suppose? I'll let you in on somethin', buddie. The Old Man won't stand for any fightin' aboard ship, but some day you an' me 're goin' into action somewheres ashore."

"Better make a note of it," said Dinty. "I've heard of guys forgettin' things."

THE *Paumota* entered the War Zone; life-vests were served out. The Hoboken draft put them on, and kept them on. They lay in their bunks at night with them on, wondering to each other how it felt to be blown up.

The ship arrived at San Nazaire; tied up to a low wharf. Great crowds of people cheered them. The troops were disembarked, sent off on a train. The older members of the crew were allowed a daylight run ashore. The old boatswain's mate, Maloney of the new draft, was allowed ashore with them.

From the deck of the ship the Hoboken draft could see a large open space. It wasn't two minutes walk away, and there were signs of plenty of life going there. When Maloney was back aboard ship, they crowded around him.

"That open space you see is what they call a plahss," said Maloney, "and it is surrounded by all kinds of restrongs and little and big caffeys."

"But what's the rest of San Nazaire like?"

"I had no time to go cruisin' all over the city," said Maloney. "I had to be back before dark, remember, so when I sight a nice lookin' little caffey I heave to, and I stay hove-to till the M.P. comes in and says all back to the ship."

All that the Hoboken draft saw of San Nazaire they saw from the ship's deck. After three days the ship put out to sea again; and the draft asked each other who it was said this was the easy ship.

The *Paumota* sailed for home in convoy. Surely—said the Hoboken draft—there will be a big liberty in a home port. After sixteen days the convoy arrived in Norfolk.

Army patrols were looking after law and order in Norfolk at this time. Young patrols mostly; and mostly straight out of civil life—the red clay of their training camp was still clinging to their legging straps. Three transport gobs, ecstatically happy to be once more back, went singing up the main street. It was raining at the time.

"Singin' and it rainin'!" observed one young A.P. to another young A.P. "They must be drunk." "They must be," agreed the other A.P., and goaded the nearest gobs in the rear with the point of his bayonet.

The Army is never slippin' anything like that over on the Navy. No, sir! The riot that followed resulted in all the battlers being thrown into the guard house, and the Provost Marshal and Commandante agreeing to stop further liberty until a Board of Inquiry should adjudge just who was to blame in the matter.

The *Paumota* arrived in Norfolk on the first day of the inquiry. The mail orderly was the only man who went ashore and to him the Old Man said: "It's still raining, I see. If you must sing ashore, son, don't let any Army Patrol ketch you at it."

Five days later, the Board being still in session, the *Paumota* put to sea. This time the *Paumota* was headed for Marseilles. "And there's a port for a liberty—Marsay," said Maloney. The new draft sat around deck listening to tales of Marseilles from Maloney. Boy, when they got to Marseilles!

The ship arrived in Marseilles. The mail orderly went ashore; also the old boatswain's mate, Maloney. The Hoboken draft, seeing him go, wished that they too had put in about ninety years in the Navy so as to rate extra privileges.

The mail orderly was back aboard ship before lunch. Maloney showed up just before dark. He arrived in a boat with two men in uniform. They helped him onto the gangway grating, waved him a smiling adieu.

Maloney ascended the gangway lad-

der, saluted the deck. He rolled a bit in the wind, but he was far from being scuppers under. The Old Man met him, saying:

"Who were your friends, Maloney?"

"Two poleesmen, sir, that I had a drink or two with my last time here." Maloney shook his head sadly: "Marsay, sir, was such a peaceful port in the old days. But now! Anarchists and bullshevicks paradin' the boulevards, and makin' speeches from the benches in the plahsses and from the tops of tables in the caffey. They were heavin' flower pots and half bricks at the polees on the corners. As for the country bein' at war, sir! *Ah bah ler gare,* meanin' to hell with war, and songs like that they are singing."

Hearing Maloney so deliver himself to the Old Man, the Hoboken draft guessed that hope of liberty in Marseilles was gone. It proved to be a good guess.

The *Paumota* sailed. Morel—the *la belle France* lad—stood on her after deck and watched the shore-line fade. "Monte Cristo and the Shatto Diff," said Morel. "And not a postcard of them to mail home! Not a card to mail home from San Nazaire. Not even a postcard from Norfolk. Seven weeks on this ship already and not one darn day ashore yet. The bird who said war is hell must 'a' been in the transport service."

They steamed to the westward. It was a slow, mean passage—head winds, high seas and fog, plenty of thick fog. Eventually Fire Island loomed ahead. And Sandy Hook. They steamed up the river to their old dock in Hoboken. Ah, Hoboken! Surely liberty now.

The *Paumota* lay in Hoboken just long enough for all hands to get in a good sleep; then she backed into the river and headed across the Atlantic again.

Ten days later they were entering the War Zone. The Hoboken draft were not yet feeling quite comfortable in the War Zone, though at that they were probably as comfortable as the Norfolk draft pretended to be. Yes, sir! Notice Norfolk gettin' too far away from their life vests in that same War Zone? No, sir!

A superior order of beings, the Norfolk draft! But wait—they'd show something yet to that Norfolk draft. They were no longer the helpless sea sick lubbers of that first eastern passage; they had grown strong and lusty with good grub, good sleeps, exercise, open air. They were sailormen now, not raw rookies; they knew their way about a ship. Some day, yes, they'd be showin' that Norfolk draft something!

It was a fine day this day; and on fine days the Old Man liked to pace the deck. His beat took him past an open ventilator. He thought he heard singing. He stepped back, bent an ear to the ventilator. He was right about the singing. Up through the ventilator came a robust:

"In fourteen hundred and ninety two
Colombo sailed the ocean blue.
In nineteen hundred and ninety-two
We'll still be sailin' the ocean blue
With never a foot ashore, lads,
And never a foot ashore.

"In fifteen hundred whatever it voss
The Flying Dutchman sailed across,
He sailed across 'nd across 'nd across
Voteffer der name of der ocean voss!

"Heave-ho, my lads, and again across,—
They sailed and sailed her again across,
But not a thing did they have on us
Aboard this commutin' Atlantic bus
With never a foot ashore, lads,
And never a foot ashore!"

The Old Man paced away; presently returned. This time he heard from the ventilator:

"My ship it is of thee,
Sweet ship of liberty,
Of thee we sing.
We love thy spars and stays,
Thy transatlantic days,
We do like he-e-ell!"

Harger had joined the Old Man.

"Shall I send below and stop them, sir?" asked Harger.

"No," said the Old Man. "Men ought to be allowed to blow off steam in wartime. How long that Hoboken draft been aboard here now? Eleven weeks?"

"Eleven weeks, yes sir."

The Old Man grinned: "Guess by this time they've got over the notion I'm the easy boss."

That day the *Paumota* sailed through acres of wreckage; and that night she picked up something or other under her stern. *Klunk aklunk, klunk aklunk* went her propeller for the rest of the way to Brest.

"Blade broke off," said the Old Man. "If I had my way, Harger, I'd pass a maritime law compellin' those damn U-boats to bury their wreckage after they blow up a ship."

ARRIVED in Brest, the Old Man put in for a diver to survey the propeller. He then gave the Norfolk and Hoboken drafts a shock: thirty men of each draft were allowed a daylight liberty. He mustered them on the quarter deck, addressed them:

"You've been cooped up in this old iron kettle for three months on end, and you've stood the strain of a trying service—winter winds, heavy seas, fog, hail, U-boat threats—stood it damn well. After three months you maybe feel like cutting loose ashore. Well, what can I say to that? Why, nothing much, except that I hope you'll try not to disgrace the ship or the service. And remember you are shipmates all. That's all, except that you will assemble in that corral near the landing pier at four-thirty this afternoon."

The ship's big motor sailer landed the liberty party at the pier. A group went whooping up the pier, full steam ahead for the nearest caffey. They did not have to steam far. Some of them stayed there for the rest of the day. The others moved on.

Brest is an ancient port. The liberty party tramped its narrow streets, peered into its shop windows. They changed dollars into francs, bought souvenirs by the dozens, postcards by the hundreds for the folks back home. They surveyed the walls that Caesar built, the navy yard that Napoleon established. They tried out strange, piquant dishes, and various "van roojes" and "van blongs" in "restrongs" and "caffeys," and through it all they tried to behave themselves for the honor of the ship and the service. In the weary weeks of confinement aboard ship they had visions of tearing their first liberty port wide open; yet here they were now touring the ancient city like a company of boy scouts—almost.

Along about four o'clock the M.P.'s and the S.P.'s—the marine and shore patrols began to round up the stragglers. The S.P.'s were all bluejackets. They poked from behind with their clubs; they stuck their heads into shops and caffeys, yelling as if everybody was hard of hearing: "Come on, you guys, and beat it to the landin' pier. Come on, come on!"

Some of the *Paumotans*, with a few extra glasses of "van rooje" under their blouses, were tempted to swing on them; but the Old Man had said they mustn't disgrace the ship, and a good guy after all, the Old Man was, and they moved on.

The two drafts were all present and accounted for in the corral near the landing pier. Last to arrive was Maloney, with an S.P. shoving him up on either side. They steered him through the corral gate and dropped him. He sat down hard, leaned his head back against the fence and went to sleep.

A ship's bell in the stream struck one bell—half past four—time to be leaving for the ship; but no motor sailer came to take them away.

They waited for the motor sailer. Two bells struck from the ship. Five o'clock? A half-hour late and still no motor boat.

They had been cooped up for three months aboard ship, their mild day of liberty hadn't taken anything out of them. They were steady enough while moving around the streets, but this standing still and waiting! They began to mill around in the corral to ease their restless nerves.

Three bells struck. Half past five? An hour late, and still no boat for them.

"What's happened the motor sailer, d'y' s'pose?" queried a plaintive voice.

"What d' y' s'pose happened her with machinist's mates of Hoboken rookies lookin' after her?" This bit came from a group of Norfolkites, of whom one was the big fellow called Red. Not far away were several of the Hoboken draft, of whom one was Dinty.

Dinty spied Red.

"What d' y' say to slappin' my stern sheets now?" asked Dinty. "All set, are yuh?"

"I'm at battle stations, buddy. Open up with all you got."

Back at the training station Dinty used to knock them cold. He now swung and landed a hard one on Red's belly: and when he did, it was as if a line had been drawn across the corral and some officer had given the order—the liberty party split into two sections, Hoboken to one side and Norfolk to the other; and they went at it.

It was a battle royal of noble proportions, thirty men swinging at thirty other men, and nobody favored. Wherever you saw an enemy head you whanged it. You whanged your special man if you had one picked out, but let another head come within range and you whanged that too.

An M.P. squad happened along, came to a halt. "They're safe in the corral, it's their own private fight, let 'em have it out," said the M.P. corporal. He leaned over the fence, tapped the old boatswain's mate Maloney with his club. "Hey, old-timer, you're missin' somethin'."

Maloney came to, watched matters a while, and said:

"It's wonderful to be young and overflowing with vitality."

"It's wonderful," said the M.P. corporal, "to see a lot of gobs being beat up and not have it blamed on us Marines."

A detail of S.P.'s came running onto the scene with the patrol captain, a big gunner's mate, in the lead. He climbed the fence, yelling: "You crazy guys, where d' y' think y' are—aboard ship?"

Nobody even looked to see who was yelling; which peeved the big gunner's mate, who had been accustomed to commanding attention from gobs on liberty. He swung his club hard on the nearest head, which happened to be Red's; went for the next nearest head, which was Dinty's.

As a fighting unit, Red was a battleship. He was slow in action; but give him time to sight a target and bring his broadside to bear and he could do great things. He now slewed his body around, brought his right arm far back like a discus thrower, and swung from his heels. He landed on the jaw of the big gunner's mate like a turret shell. Dinty at the same time ducked his club and hit the big S.P. fair amidship.

The big gunner's mate folded up. Dinty and Red picked him up by the head and heels, dropped him back over the corral fence.

"There," murmured Maloney, "is what I call co-operation."

"Swell!" said the M.P. corporal. "Gobs beating up their own patrols."

The S.P. detail roared as one man at the outrage. They swarmed over the fence, swatted right and left with their clubs. They were going good until a powerful voice, the voice of big Red bellowed:

"What right these guys got to be whangin' us?"

The good going for the S.P.'s ended right there. Every last one was soon lying in the mud.

At this stage the M.P. corporal decided to have a word to say: "Gobs and S.P.'s, they're all flatfoots," he confided to Maloney, "but authority's authority and it's got to be respected." Into the corral he charged at the head of his detail, yelling: "What the hell you guys tryin' to do? Think you're goin' to get away with that rough stuff ? Come on, fellas, break it up."

To Morel, the *la belle France* lad, came a great inspiration. He was very tall, a head above most of them. He waved his cap high, and sonorously he shouted: "This way, *Paumota!* Stand together, *Paumota.* We're all shipmates, our captain said. One for all and all for one! Heave at 'em, *Paumotans.*"

It was just the touch needed. The separated drafts swung into action as a single unit. They went berserk. They were doing a fine job on the M.P.s when into the corral came a naval officer on the run, shouting: "Cease firing, *Paumota!* Cease firing, I say."

It was Mr. Brinser, their junior deck officer, a good guy. They ceased firing. "Now then! Fall in! Right face! Double time."

They double-quicked it to the landing pier, where they found the motor sailer waiting. It seems she had been delayed by her engine breaking down on her way to the pier.

The sailer *put-put-putted* to the ship. The two drafts were mustered on the quarter deck. Mr. Brinser reported to the Old Man, who by and by came out and looked them over. They were a tough looking outfit—blouses ripped off, and sometimes shirts, eyes blacked, noses bloodied, lips split. Only the old-timer Maloney looked like one who hadn't been rolling in the mud all day.

"Dismissed," said the Old Man presently. "I'll have something to say about this later."

"The brig and ten days I suppose it will be for everybody," said that romantic one, Morel, "but damn it, it was worth it."

The Old Man called Maloney into the cabin.

"Now then, what's the story? And no shading it, mind, in favor of our fellows. Just what happened?"

The old-timer told what happened. He concluded with:

"It was inspiring, captain; in the beginnin', those two drafts fighting each other like the Gwelps and Jiberlins of old, but in the end, captain—no Norfolk and no Hoboken! Shipmates all, fightin' side by side."

The Old Man sent for Dinty and Red.

"What do you two mean," began the Old Man, "by fighting on liberty?"

"It was this way, sir, about those patrols—" Dinty got no further.

"I wasn't speaking about patrols. I'm speaking of you two—shipmates," he barked. "Shipmates fighting!" He eyed them sternly. Suddenly he said: "Shake hands."

Dinty and Red hastened to shake hands.

"That's better. And now I'm going to put you two on report. There will be extra duty for you both. Tomorrow morning immediately after breakfast you will report to the officer of the deck."

NEXT morning the Old Man went ashore, called in at Admiralty Headquarters, met the captain of the port. They had been shipmates on the world cruise of the battle fleet in Roosevelt's day. They smoked a cigar together, talked of the older days. Then:

"What were those hyenas of yours trying to do to my patrol captain yesterday?"

"That's good—patrols squawking when somebody uses them rough."

"My patrols aren't squawking. They can take it. But you know there's such a thing as—"

"I know, and this morning I gave the two men who put your big patrol captain out—I handed them punishment."

"Look here, I'm not wanting any men punished. I was merely—"

"That's all right. I sent them off in the motor whale boat to patrol the mouth of the harbor and watch for U-boats."

"U-boats off the mouth of the harbor lately? I didn't know that. What will they do if they should see one?"

"Their instructions," said the Old Man, "in case they sight a U-boat, are to jump overboard, swim to her, heave her a line and tow her in!"

"Grrh!" gritted the captain of the port. "Transport service makes people brighter than hell, don't it? I suppose you want to go into dry dock to ship a new propeller? Well, you can't go in for four days yet."

"That means I'll be in port ten days?"

"All of that."

"Fine!" said the Old Man. He left headquarters humming "Anchors Aweigh," went back aboard the ship, called in his yeoman, said to him: "Type a bulletin that all men not on report may put in for Paris liberty up to six days beginning tomorrow. Here—wait. Strike out the words 'not on report.' Get that off, post it up on the ship's bulletin board."

The Old Man was pacing the deck before lunch. He paused at an open ventilator pipe. Maloney came on deck from below. He saw the Old Man with his ear bent low.

"That buzzin' sound you hear, sir, is the Hoboken and Norfolk drafts with their heads together talkin' of what they 're goin' to do when they get to Paris," said Maloney.

"Pleased, are they?"

"They are, sir, and surprised. After what you said of them back in Hoboken they thought you were down on them forever."

"No, no. A damn fine lot of men, I call them now. They rate whatever I can give them. But when they first came aboard—I'll leave it to you—weren't they worst looking new draft you ever saw coming over a ship's side?"

"I never saw a new draft that wasn't the worst draft that ever came over a ship's side," said Maloney.

HILL-BILLY

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

DEPUTY Sheriff Sulare picked up Kip Haines on suspicion. Kip was hanging around the block in River Street which had the most pool rooms, shooting galleries and loafing places in Chuton. In the sheriff office in the County Court Building the boy stood, freckled, red-haired, tall, gaunt and worried, twisting his hat, telling just how it happened. Back in the mountains, where he came from, corn was sure scarce and fur was about gone, folks were poor and didn't have enough to do to keep themselves busy, let alone hire anyone to help them do nothing at all.

"Course, yo' know how that is, Misteh Sher'f," Kip said. "I don't mean no harm. All I be'n askin' is jes' work to do, so's I c'n eat enough to get along on, while I'm learnin', waitin', hopin', suh."

"Well, what could you do if you had a job?" Sheriff Dutton asked.

"Um-m, well, I c'n swing an ax, lift and lug, lobby-dog, pull a raft, sweep, drive mules, break stone—"

"Where'd yo' learn to break stone?"

"In the Gray Marble Quarry, suh."

"What else? We've little work of that kind in town, you know."

"I'm not proud, suh. Since coming to town I've swept an' dusted, washed dishes, cleaned windows—don't leave no streaks, nuther—porter into a blind tiger an' game place, handle fightin' chickens, tend the babies—"

"Whose babies?"

"Two-three places I noticed ladies with kidlets was bothered to death, watchin' little chaps in the scramblin' age, an' I looked afteh ten-fifteen of 'em along one block—"

"Which block?"

"Along Ridgeback, suh—Point to Saddle, suh."

"Oh, you were getting ideas along there, how to pick up one of those youngsters, putting the finger on him for snatchers, eh?"

"No, suh, sher'f," Kip shook his head, "I'm honorable. If I go bad, suh, hit won't be little chilluns er women, but men. Growed up, healthy men, suh."

"Be'n thinking about going bad?"

"A man who's hungry and miserable, lots of times, cain't he'p but think, suh," the suspect answered, frankly.

"Then you actually figured on pulling a job; what kind of a job did you have in mind?"

"No, sher'f, not really," the youth shook his head. "I reckon if I ain't, so far, gone crooked, I prob'ly won't, neveh."

"What gives you that idea?"

"Well, suh, I've be'n hongry," he said, "two-three fellers drapped in a while back. In two weeks I'd had four quarts of milk, three loaves of bread, and a two-pound jar of peanut butter. Those boys spotted me. They sat me in with them and I had my fustest square meal in three new moons, suh. They asted me one question to pay for it. I took my mother's ring off'n my hand, suh, to pay fo' what I'd had. He took it an' throwed it into the riveh, my mother's fustest wedding ring."

"You've got that ring, now."

"Yas, suh. The water was high, an' when it went down I—I located that ring. I'd sealed her my love promise on hit."

"What was the question that mob asked you?"

"If I knowed where Butter Jim Morris cached his wad."

"You knew?"

"Yas, suh—I'd portered for the High Tide—odd jobbing."

"You told?"

"No, suh; I c'n lie, when necessary to mind my own business, suh."

"Where are those yeggs, now?"

"Went on down the riveh, suh."

"You look hungry, Kip."

"Yas, suh, I reckon."

"When did you eat last?"

"Yistehd'y ev'ing, suh," he smiled at the memory, "I found a chestnut tree back on the ridges. I built a lil' fiah and roasted some."

"Why didn't you bring in a bushel or two?"

"I did, suh, 'bout a peck."

"How come you didn't eat today?"

"Why — well, you see — uh — theh's right smart of hongry men and women, suh, down along Riveh Street. I was jes' going back to that tree. Hit's still sheddin' chestnuts, suh."

"Take him over to the Court Lunch, Sulare, an' see that he eats too much, for once," Sheriff Dutton ordered. Kip had beat his examination.

They needed somebody around the County Court House who wasn't merely a trusty from the jail. Kip Haines was, for safety-sake, taken into the odd job, so to speak, and the sheriff, Undersheriff Cupples, and the deputies had him at their beck and call—running errands, cleaning out the sheriff office, carrying messages, bringing lunches to locked-up juries, cleaning the county rifles and short guns. For these he had an empty cell to sleep in and a $3.50 ticket every week at the Court Lunch. He went down on the sheriff office expense account.

The Hill Billy, Kip was called. He looked taller than he was, and his thin figure filled out a little on the food he chose, cornmeal, sausage, hot cakes, milk, vegetables, roast beef chunks and so on. He just lived around the Court House. That was his home, right plumb in the Mansion of the People. He minded his

own business, and his amusement was picking on a banjo. The instrument had belonged to Picking Pete, who was killed by a stray bullet down in Butter Jim Morris's High Tide when some shooting meanness was badly aimed. A deputy sheriff had brought the banjo and hung it on the office wall, where it accumulated dust for three-four years, and then Kip Haines took it down one day to dust, tuned the strings and began to pick, low and soft, so it wouldn't disturb any one, not even the prisoners in the locked cells or the big bull pen.

A natural aptitude for mountain and river music was in the fingers of Kip Haines. He knew all the old folk-tunes and the pretty new ones. The sheriff caught him playing one day, and when the officers were sitting around, between court sessions and waiting for business, they had Kip sitting in a corner. They watched his long, narrow hands, the poking in and out of his elbows, and listened to the playing. A man had to be cold, grisly and unimaginative not to have waking dreams, listening to the rippling, ringing thumping of the youth who was chinking in doing the odds and ends of things nobody else need do.

Right smart of trouble had been had, getting the county guns cleaned the way they ought to be. Before Kip came along, the man who put the weapons best in order was Tupelo Krapes—another man out of the Hills. He sure cleaned them slick. He put them into just perfect condition. One day he took his pick and locked the sheriff, the undersheriff, five deputies and the jailer in individual cells, turned all the other prisoners loose and went back into the mountains where he had come from. After that, of course, a new administration came in and no trusty was allowed to keep the firearms in order. Kip saved the deputies a lot of bother, accordingly.

Tupelo Krapes was sure bad. He scouted the mountain ridges and lived on the country. He was real up-to-date, too, and picked up ideas regarding banks, mine and mill payrolls, and express shipments. He shot a banker down. When two banker association detectives came prowling up into the hill country to ask intimate and confidential questions, the coroner had to ship the investigators back where they came from.

REWARDS began to pile up on Tupelo. At first it was $100, then $500. When he hired out in the Rappley-Corden War, at $100 per killing, and Marsh Rappley, Dave Roberts and another relative by marriage were killed down, the family brought the bids up to $1,600. The bank business, along with the rest of it, gave $3,250, all told, on his capture or killing.

Krapes stood a shade over 5 feet 7 inches tall. His shoulders were wide, though, and he had big arms and a thick chest, a round head and a small neck. Where he slept, there he lived. He traveled nights and never breathed where he was going. He came down to moonshine stills, trappers' shacks, river rat shanty-boats and was good company, but watchful and suspicious. When he grew nervous and crowded, he didn't go where anyone was, but lived in hollow trees, caves and abandoned houses.

Chuton Court was located nearly centrally in the country which Tupelo Krapes called his home. As a boy he had lived in town, and gone to school. His father was a shifty, easy-going man with a friendly disposition, but his mother had supplied Tupelo's spunk and get-up-and-get. They lived in shacks, shanty-boats and, for quite a spell, in Wildcat Castle, a cave back in the mountains. Tupelo's town and woods experience had given him a lot of advantages over a man who didn't know city manners and country ways.

If it hadn't been for hiring an expensive lawyer, Krapes would have been

able to save up quite a lot of money.

The Hon. Purvey Sevier cost a lot of money, but he never had a man hanged, and the number of his clients who had died of prison ailments in the penitentiary could be counted on the fingers of two hands. He was a genial, smiling, twinkling-eyed man, with no political ambitions. He would come into the sheriff's office and listen to Kip Haines playing the banjo.

"The trouble with you is, Kip, you haven't any ambition," the criminal lawyer remarked, smiling. "You're lazy, shiftless and contented. What makes a man good in this world is wanting something somebody else has got and then getting it. Yo're the best banjo picker I eveh heard, and I've heard the good ones. Where does that get you? If you used that same mind you got studying law or banking or writing speeches in politics, you'd amount to something."

"I expect," Kip assented, "but how c'n an iggerant feller like me git eddicated?"

"All there is to education is getting rid of things that you know which aren't so and are of no use," the lawyer answered, "and replacing them, filling the vacancies with things that are so and which are valuable—making you an expert in something or other."

Later, Kip Haines went to the Chuton Public Library, and came away with a book. He sat with it on his knees, his banjo against his stomach, and read, while he picked jig-time tunes about "Our Southern Highlanders." Next he perused "The Outlaw Years" and then "The Cowboy Detective." The deputies laughed and jeered when he borrowed "Criminal Law for Common Citizens," which Judge Marion Houston had written but never had printed. And Kip saved all the reward notices that came to the office.

"You oughta be able to sing Law and Order to banjo music," the sheriff chuckled one day.

Kip blushed and grinned, but didn't say anything.

"How come you neveh get to talk none, Kip?" one of the boys asked. "Looks like you say less'n anybody I eveh did see."

Kip fidgeted. Sitting back in the corner, hardly any one paid any attention to him. On a gloomy day, with rain and chill in the wind, he couldn't hardly be seen, except just his eyes. Sometimes they would shine like a 'coon's. His music was a low, humming background to the talk, hardly noticed at all, but when he wasn't playing, the quiet was hard and ominous, worrying whoever was around.

The sheriff and two deputies picked up a bad nigger one day, Mingo Tom Feeder. He was tall, ugly and strong. His muscles rolled out on his shoulders like hams, his hips were like a bear's, and his long, thin legs were engine's piston rods. Feeder came up the bank off a steamer, where he had worked as a roustabout, and went to work in the sawmill on the boom, pike-poling. He had trouble with the raft and yard boss, a white man named Janders, who was good, and carried a four foot hickory club on his rounds. One day he larruped Mingo Tom across the overalls.

"White man," the big darky said, "I don't admiah that. Don't do hit again."

"Nigger, 'tend to yo' business and I'll tend to mine," Janders said, whipping the hickory around so it hummed in the wind. On Saturday night the boom and yard boss took a taste too much up-town and came down to the Black and Tan where he found Mingo Tom heel-and-toeing to three guitars, two fiddles and a banjo.

"Nigger," Janders said, "on Monday yo' better dance the floaters as fast as yo' steps tonight."

"Yas, suh," Mingo Tom grinned, and the corners of his lips turned down in-

stead of up, "but yo' better keep off'n them logs, yo'se'f, suh."

Janders came running across the logs in the boom on Monday afternoon. Rain was falling, shreds of mist whirling up like dancing maids, and people saw him heading out where the pike-polers were working down the sticks of a raft they were breaking up. The hands all punched the clock same as usual that night. But Janders was notional. He never had and he never would tote a key with a brass number check on it. He came and he went as he damned pleased. And that night nor the next morning he didn't quit and he didn't show up. The yard and boom practically run themselves and Janders was seen by nobody. In the middle of the afternoon the Office sent for him, and come to find out nobody had seen him. A tally man working through the lumber had seen him start for the boom. Somebody had seen him skipping over the floaters.

Sheriff Dutton and Chief of Police Random investigated. They made inquiries around, heard that Mingo Tom had fair-warned Janders not to hit him again, and that Janders had told him to dance the floaters right smart come Monday; and then Mingo Tom had grinned another warning, that the Boom Boss better keep off the logs if'n Mingo Tom was dancing on them.

They picked up the big darkie in the Black and Tan. When they looked him over they found the mark of that first welt of the big limber hickory club and a fresh, ridgy one right above it laid across the muscles of his buttock.

"Mingo Tom," Sheriff Dutton asked, "looks like Janders didn't leave yo' alone, after you told him you didn't admire to be whaled."

"I don't know how hit looks, sher'f," the darkie said.

"The last seen of him, he was skipping to'd yo' where yo' was poling the logs up the eddy into the chains," Chief Random said. "He went into the rain and fog and neveh did get to come out, black man."

"Lots of fellers starts fo' places an' neveh gits theh."

"How come that second welt, Mingo?" Dutton asked.

"We be'n shovin' down a lot of small, skinned gum sticks. They float high an' roll fast. Ah jumped a smaller an' she bucked. Ah come down, lookin' between mah feet, Mars Sher'f. Ah landed on a butt-end root swell. I 'membeh she smacked, but I double-twisted an' got my balance feet down whar they b'long ag'in. I'se workin' suh, not mournin' mah hurts. Ef'n yo' hadn't 'minded me, I'd never thought ag'in of that upset, suh."

"You mean Janders didn't lambaste yo' an' yo' didn't roll him down in deep?" Random demanded.

"Course, ef'n I had, I'd lie to say I didn't," Mingo Tom said, "but I didn't, so I ain't got to lie, suh."

"You're a smart nigger," Dutton said. "We're going to hold you a day or two. Likely some of those other log wallopers'll saw something and they can talk."

They locked the big darkie in a cell by himself. It was next to the one Kip Haines slept in, and Kip asked him if the banjo music would bother him, playing there, soft, in the night.

"Yo' mean if'n hit keeps me awake, er minds me of mah sins yo'd quit playin', white boy?" the prisoner asked, staring.

"You couldn't go away out of hearing," Kip answered. "I could—if I wanted to, go somewhere else."

"Play on, boy!" the prisoner suspect said. "Ah kin dream to those ol' rouster tunes—dream mahself into the Lower Riveh an' sing mahself to sleep, 'thout openin' my mouf. Ef'n I could, I'd pay yo' orchestra wages to play me music, suh."

Kip played and the darkie listened. Sometimes he danced. When the jailer came he pushed the meals through the

bars, and jumped when Mingo Tom growled or made quick motions toward him. When the cell door was unlocked, a deputy sheriff stood back with a sawed off shotgun. The odd jobber, though, didn't worry about him.

"Boy, I'd pull this yeah steel perfection an' brick misery just all apart, ef'n hit want fo' that music," the suspect declared. "I neveh was in jail befo', but that music is worth the miseries. I neveh had enough of hit befo. Mah mind needs those tunes. Ef'n I walk the one way corridor, I want marchin' music in my ears."

"If you didn't kill—drown—Janders, you won't march it," Kip exclaimed.

"I didn't, white boy," Mingo Tom said. "They wouldn't believe me. I didn't tell 'em the rest of hit. He come oveh onto them skinned bark, light-floatin' gums, an' they're quicker'n a mule cain kick. That Boom Boss sho' was good in his day, but his day was done. One of them buckers flopped his stiff old laigs. I jumped, higher, furder an' faster'n I eveh done before. I was too late, sweeping deep to hook him up. Theh's a squirt-current off'n a rock point in that back-up current, an' he was caught into hit. Ah slipped, same as I said. Ah did land an' spank myse'f, jes' thataway, too. Po'r Janders! Po'r nigger! Boy, play me that piece, 'Stormy Winds, Boomin' an' Whistlin', Rarin' Down the Bottoms'."

Ah'm jes anotheh nigger,
An' no p'tickler friends,
A logger an' a jigger
On me no one depends!

Ah live upon the riveh,
Ah roam along the shore,
Ah'm jes' a passing liveh
On mah way to nevehmore.

Oh, gimme now my freedom ticket,
Send me on mah way ag'in,
Ah'm at home in any thicket,
Ah'm accused of ev-ry sin.

All I ask is banjo picking,
Piece o' pone an' slab o' bacon;
Ah neveh was no good at slicking,
So they got me jailed at Chuton.

Oh, Lawd, let me into the world today,
Ah neveh was no han' to sit an' pray;
Jes' let me work mah job along mah road,
An' if he comes, Oh, Lawd, I'll git the Devil throwed.

NATURALLY, seeing and hearing Kip Haines picking and Mingo Tom singing, the sheriff wanted to know what the prisoner suspect told him. Kip hesitated. Having thought it out, he repeated what Mingo Tom had said about the way Boss Janders slipped among the logs and went deep. With that to work on, another negro out in the boom confirmed it. Sheriff sent Kip with the cell key to turn the big nigger loose. He was bad, of course, one of those quiet, suspicious and hard-looking men, with hands big enough to pull a man apart.

"Aw right, Mingo Tom," Kip Haines said to the prisoner. "Sher'f says to turn you loose."

"Some white man signed fo' me?" Mingo asked.

"No," Kip shook his head, "I didn't mind my own business. I told the sheriff what you said about Boss Janders being too stiff-legged to hop-light on the peeled gum logs."

"Yo' stool pigeoned on me, white boy?" the big darkie demanded.

"Just what'd show you wasn't bad this time, Tom. I'll talk good about a man; if I know anything bad, I know theh's a reason."

"So yo' let me out into the world ag'in!" the darkie nodded. "Boy, I owe yo' plenty I cain't neveh pay yo' back. Maybe ef'n I knowed I could he'p pay. Yo' know that Tupelo Krapes? Ah ain't no use fo' him. He 'sociates with niggers. He's jes mean, shif'less, po'r white. Yo' in'trusted in him, white boy?"

"I reckon, Mingo," Kip Haines nodded. "He's the feller killed my pap, down by Rimcreek Bottoms."

"An' that scoundrel killed yo' pap!" the darkie rolled his eyes and grinned, the corners of his long lips curling down

at the ends, a mean look on them. "Ah ain' gwine tell nobody but yo'. Them Hill-Billies bring rafts down the riveh. They talk. I heah 'm. Ah'm bad, boy! Ah'm mean, treach'rous, full of hate. Ah neveh had no right to lose fo' weeks in that Chuton Jail. Yo' paid fo' hit in music. Some day ah'll send yo' word. Ah'll say theh's a skunk den in the mountangs. Yo' come alone—"

"I'll come alone, Mingo Tom," Kip promised, and he watched the tall, supple, limber figure cake-walking, jigging, cross-footing down the jail concrete walk, swaying and breathing deep, singing, out in the world again.

"Boy, yo' jes' go down around the dance halls and Black and Tans with that banjo of yourn," Sheriff Dutton said. "You'll heah plenty of talk, 'bout who does a lot of these petty larcenies and drunk rollings, those things. You'll need a little money. You'll earn some, passing the hat. I'll pay you a dollar a day."

"No, sher'f, I cain't stool pigeon, not for any one," the youth shook his head. "I've reasons for being around. I'm Hill Billy, sher'f, I'm honorable. I mind my own business—"

"You told what Mingo Tom said."

"I never hurt a man with my tongue, sher'f," Kip shook his head. "If'n I c'n find good things to say about somebody that's hurt, wrongful, I'll tell yo' them. But I don't bear witness against any man except'n one, to hurt him."

"And that one?"

"None of yo' damned business, sher'f."

"Who yo' talkin' to?"

"Sher'f Dutton, of Chuton Court, suh."

"Well—"Sheriff Dutton burst into a laugh. "All right, boy. I'll pay you $1 a day, expense and wage money, to find out good things about anybody. That's a bargain."

"Yas, suh. An' I c'n take that office banjo, sheriff?"

"Eh, sure! It's yours; such stuff'd oughta b'long to those that c'n use 'em."

Kip Haines went down the slope to the river bank. Everywhere he went he took the banjo. He kept his ears open and his mouth shut. He slept in the county jail, and floating to his hearing came whispering that he was a stool pigeon. His music had to be sure good, but when Jud Wilkit was stabbed and found dead in Turtle Alley, they let Durey Lawson go after arresting him. Kip had heard the truth from Durey's sweetheart. He passed it on to Sheriff Dutton. That left it up to Butter Jim Morris to explain how come he was so free accusing Jud when he knew better. Butter Jim tangled himself, explaining. He went to jail for seven years, and Hon. Purvey Sevier regarded this as one of the greatest victories in a long career of criminal lawyering. Butter Jim not getting hanged was a feat.

Kip Haines harmed nobody. He was a stool pigeon for the falsely accused and the hard-of-lucks. Mostly he just played his banjo and made it ring softer than a guitar, sweeter than a fiddle and more stirring than a snare drum. People who heard him down in the Black and Tans took him up on the Ridge and he played for Old Home parties. He lived in Chuton, waiting.

And sure enough, Mingo Tom sent word to him one afternoon that there was a skunk den in the mountains, and a yellow stripe offset by sure black hides.

Kip went up to the County Court House and found Sheriff Dutton alone in the office. He had before him spread out eight reward notices and several typewritten sheets which recorded the crimes of Tupelo Krapes. Krapes had killed two men during the past year, and he had robbed another bank. He was worth $5000 for any man's time.

Dutton looked up at the banjo picker-pigeon— "Well, boy, what do you want?"

"I want to borrow a gun, suh."

"You cain't wear a gun." Dutton

shook his head. "You're just a citizen, tha's all. You'd be fined $50 by any judge in Tennessee."

"Then let me have a .30-30 carbine, suh."

"Yo' reckon yo're going into big game huntin,' eh?"

"Yas, suh."

"Kip, I've of'en wondered 'bout yo," the sheriff squinted at him. "You're name is Kip Haines. A man by the name of Clint Haines was killed 'bout seven yeahs ago, back down in Rimcreek Bottoms. Any relation of your'n, Kip?"

"Yas, suh—pap."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty years."

"How long yo, be'n 'round the Court, heah?"

"Two terms, suh, six yeahs."

"I can't let you use stale ammunition, Kip. I reckon yo' know I'm liable to be euchred out'n the nomination, this yeah?"

"Theh's talk. I ain't much fo' politics."

"And yo' want to borrow a rifle and a short gun, Kip?"

"Nothin' illegal, suh, but—"

"C'me 'ere, Kip!"

The pigeon walked around the end of the desk, and the sheriff's hand went into a drawer. He threw back the youth's coat and pulled down his shirt pocket and pinned in it a little shield.

"There!" he said. "Yo're a deputy sher'f now, Kip. He'p yo'se'f to the guns, ammunition, anything you want."

Kip Haines tried to speak, but his tongue tied a knot. He turned to the weapons and Sheriff Dutton left him alone in the office. He saw Kip heading over to Jay Street on his way across the river bridge. They telephoned over from the sawmill that Kip had come over, and that big nigger, Mingo Tom Feeder, had drawn his time and gone south on the road with that Court House hanger-on Kip Haines, that banjo picker. The sheriff thanked them, kindly.

Sheriff Dutton tried to keep track of the two but they left the mountain pike before they reached Hawk Run. They went up on Kettle Ridge, and worked along into the tangle-brush and roughs.

They cut across the corner of the Fireplace Mountains and came down into the open country through cut-overs and abandoned farms. Night, their second night out, found them looking from a brush pasture into a cluster of dark cabins with red firelight flickering through the unchinked logs and glowing pink over the hearth-chimneys. No light of candles were there. Doors were closed and windows curtained.

"This yeah's Watermelon," Mingo Tom explained. "This feller Krapes is heah, in that last cabin on yon side. He killed all the dawgs theh, so's they wouldn't bark. We gotta swing down wind to hit. Then we'll come up. That cabin has one door an' one window fo' the cook. Ah'll git to the door—yo' the window. Sometimes he goes out one, sometimes the otheh."

"Hit's my business, Mingo. Yo' stay yeah."

AFTER an argument, Mingo remained. He could see the dark shadow of Kip Haines working around to the cabin for the stars were bright. He followed and sat at the top of the cabin garden where he could watch the kitchen slide window. Kip went to the end door and he hailed—

"Howdy, the cabin! Pick Jason—open up!"

The cabin was dark. The fire had been banked. Even the coals no longer glowed within. Cocking his head, Mingo Tom heard shocks rattling and a quick thud as somebody lit out of a bunk and hit the floor. He slid down the garden, behind stacked corn, getting closer, hidden from any prying eyes looking through cracks in the logs.

Suddenly the kitchen slide opened wide. A long leg came through as a man

started out. Like a shadow, Kip Haines darted along the cabin wall, and coming up behind the figure, reached and slapped a handcuff on the wrist where the man rested his hand on the sill, hoisted the fellow's foot and snapped the other chain cuff on his ankle.

A bull-like roar, high, shrill, terrific came from the man thus caught by surprise and ironed by strategy. He fell out on the ground, but dropped his revolver from his free hand and, with his arm across his back, one foot held up, caught to the wrist, he was helpless.

Kip threw a flashlight beam through the open window and looked into the one room cabin. At his side a voice declared;

"Neveh mind them, Mars Kip! They ain't nothin' but jes niggers, that's all. Pick Jason couldn't he'p hisse'f, gittin' 'sociated with this low white trash, suh."

"Come on, Tupelo Krapes," Kip Haines said, when he had frisked his captive and taken three guns from their holsters and given Mingo Tom a repeating shotgun. "I'm taking yo' to town."

"Yo' traitor, yo' scoundrel, I'll eat the heart right out'n you!" the prisoner declared. "I'll tear yo' plumb in quarters—"

"No, Tupelo—not me," Haines said. "Yo' neveh could do that to me. I'm takin' yo' in to hang or burn—whicheveh state handles you."

"Listen, I got money, I c'n pay—"

"That's more like, Tupelo Krapes," Kip answered, gently, "You know you c'n pay. That's one point. Anotheh is yo're going to pay. But hit won't be in money, Tupelo."

"Who are yo,' anyhow?"

"'Member Clint Haines, Tupelo Krapes?"

"Clint Haines— He—he yain't none of *yo'* business. I c'n make hit worth—plenty—"

"Yo' cain't neveh pay all yo' owe, Tupelo," Kip said. "But yo' pay all yo' can, yas, suh."

"Who—who are yo'? I never harmed yo'—"

"I am Kip Haines," came the answer. "That little chap yo' throwed oveh into the laurel bresh, an' then shot my daddy daid. Yas, suh—yo'll pay."

They took their prisoner to Chutone Court, and Kip delivered him to Sheriff Dutton, who stared at that infamous outlaw astonished.

"I owe yo' him, sher'f," Kip said. "Four yeahs yo' let me stay till I could learn sheriffin' an' the fine p'ints of law. Hyar's yo' man. I pay my debts, sher'f."

"I'll say—I reckon," Sheriff Dutton exclaimed. "I'll be re-elected, boy. I know yo' thought of that. Well, theh's jes' $5,000 reward on this mountain scoundrel. That's yours. I'll write the drafts on the banks. Hyar you are. Yassuh—"

"Thank yo', sher'f," Kip Haines said, taking the slips. "Come on you, Mingo Tom. I need yo' to come watch me!"

"Yas, suh," the big darkie said. "Ah'll sho' pretect yo', Dep'ty Kip!"

They went over to the bank with its big marble columns and the great plate windows. Inside Mingo Tom stood back while Kip cashed the drafts on the rewards offered for Tupelo Krapes. The deputy sheriff turned.

"There it is, Tom. Your half—$2,500."

"Wha'—wha'—mine, *white* man?"

"Yours."

"Well, doggone yo' red-haid and freckled hide, yo'!" the darkie exclaimed.

"What's the matter, Mingo?"

"Why—Why, I yain't a free nigger no mo'! I'll buy me a passel of land an' a cabin. An' theh Ah'll be, plantin', an' hoein' an' harvestin'—nothin' but work—work—work all the time!" the darkie grimaced. "An' how c'n ah be a bad nigger any mo', suh? Doggone, white man, Ah jes' knowed yo' banjo-pickin' had me comin'—comin'—comin' along, an' Ah couldn't neveh git away no mo'!"

UNDER THE FRONT LINES

A novelette

By ARED WHITE

CHAPTER I

A PRUSSIAN FOX IN A DEEP HOLE

RUE MONTROSS, at the point where it meanders to the Seine, had all the aspects of a dead and forgotten street, a forsaken relic of bygone decades, a mere bypath in the vast network of Paris thoroughfares. Occasionally a heavy wagon, drawn by beefy draft horses, clattered down the worn cobblestones to the river with a load of wine casks for a freight barge. Or a laborer, wharf-rat, transient soldier on leave or other wayfarer wandered that way, usually to drop in at Oudert's, a dismal old French cafè at the end of the street. Otherwise Rue Montross was without sign of life.

But Captain Fox Elton, American Military Intelligence, knew that Rue Montross was anything but a dead street. He was fully aware of its pitfalls, of the sinister dangers that lurked in the Cafè Oudert, of the resourceful rascal who struck in the dark against unwelcome or incautious intruders upon this mysterious domain.

In the two days that Captain Elton had been secreted in a second-story rathole of a billet across the way from Oudert's, nothing had happened to reward his patient vigil. Hour after hour, day and night, he had taken his turn with his assistant, Lieutenant McGee, at sitting with eyes glued to the battered green shutters of his clandestine billet. It was hard on the patience, hard on the nerves, hard on the stomach. But Elton knew something might happen, something to give him a lead on a spy trail

that at least would unmask the Prussian spymaster's line of secret communication with Germany.

Oudert's was the known entrance to Herr Captain Baron von Straef's mysterious network under Paris. The French Deuxieme Bureau had known that for many months. In fact the entire Allied secret service knew it. A score of good French agents had gone prying into the old rum shop at one time or another, intent on following the Prussian spymaster into the depts of his lair under Paris. None had ever returned. The bodies of most of them had been found later floating down the Seine. The others had vanished in thin air.

"A sweet life, this, Cap'n," Lieutenant McGee complained for the twentieth time. "Hell's bells, a fine lemon we've been handed—sitting here in this hole while the American Army maneuvers up for its first big battle in the St. Mihiel country. Damn it, Cap'n, I came over here to fight, not hold the sack in Paris!"

"Go ahead, crab to your heart's content," Elton said with an indulgent smile. "It'll make you feel better—especially if we have to stay here a few more days."

McGee groaned, lighted a cigarette and took several quick puffs. The long, dismal inaction visibly wore on his nerves. McGee had little heart for the dull, exacting routine that sometimes went into Elton's spy cases. When there was action he was in his element. Elton had often said that McGee, like old Sergeant Walters, would rather risk his life in a brisk adventure than wait in prudence for an hour.

The two men, though they had worked together through long months, on no less than a score of cases, were little alike. McGee was tall, slender, heavy and square of jaw and feature, impulsive and quick to decision. Elton was of medium stature, trim, well-knit, ordinarily quiet and very deliberate. He had that infinite capacity for pains and details that is necessary to success in espionage operations. And he had an advantage of very youthful appearance, of mild blue eyes that appeared to mirror innocent inexperience and guilelessness. An expert judge of men, looking in his eyes, might have detected the firmness and cool intelligence in their depths, and been warned accordingly. But to date some of the shrewdest of the Prussian secret agents had failed to reckon him at par, to their subsequent disaster.

"Seems like the French could take care of their own spies," McGee said bitterly, after a dismal silence. "At least, if they don't like the idea of this Prussian nest right here in the heart of Paris, they could go in with engineers and dynamite. That'd clean the mess up in a hurry!"

"That's been thought of plenty of times," Elton rejoined patiently. "But that would only drive von Straef to another prepared position. Therefore the French are smart to pretend not to know too much about this place—and wait for a chance to catch the Prussian in their trap one day—just as we once trapped von Straef's star predecessor, von Strindheim."

"Well, I don't see why Colonel Rand had to force us into the picture, Cap'n."

"Trapping von Straef may not be our job, but watching his spy-runners is very much an American worry right now," Elton reminded. "Since the tip leaked out that the American First Army is shaping up for its first big drive, the Imperial secret service is giving that preferred attention. I haven't any doubt but that von Straef has his orders from Wilhelmstrasse to produce all details of the American order of battle for St. Mihiel—and I'd not bet ten centimes he'll fail to get the information."

"It'd be easy to get a bet out of me we're on a dead trail, Cap'n," McGee replied disconsolately. "Cooped up here watching a cold foxhole."

"That," said Elton, "remains to be seen."

Elton consulted his wrist watch and stepped back from the green shutters. He and McGee divided between them, in one-hour shifts, the rocking monotony of observing events down on Rue Montross.

"Your turn, McGee," he announced. "But cheer up. Supper ought to be along now any minute."

"Ugh!" McGee muttered. "More of that damnable chocolate and saccharine. More black bread and stale eggs!"

"Men out in the front lines on iron rations would think we're living fat here, McGee."

"Maybe so, Cap'n. But those lads out front get a little action with their war."

"Well, I'm not too sure this little job of ours will be altogether a Sunday picnic by the time we're through with it."

"No such luck," McGee muttered with a doleful shake of his tousled head. "Von Straef may be back in Berlin for all we know."

On the stairway below they heard the thump of sabots. Unmistakably the aged French wharfinger whose wife prepared eggs and chocolate three times daily for two strange boarders who asked no questions and offered no information, but paid cash for what was served them.

"I don't see why we can't send that frog out for some cold beer," McGee grumbled.

"Forget it, McGee. The French went to a lot of trouble smuggling us into this hole. And they warned us not to take chances of letting von Straef wind us. So far we've been lucky."

"Whatever you say goes, Cap'n. But me, I can't see where there'd be anything wrong in sending out for something cool. Even if there is any such person as von Straef in Paris, why should he get excited because an old Frenchman went out for some cold beer?"

"We've been warned this is a ticklish position and we're taking no chances of any kind," Elton said bruskly. "Besides, you've crabbed enough for once, Lieutenant. Now get your eyes back on that window and settle your mind back on your business."

"Yes'r and beg the Cap'ns pardon," McGee replied promptly and without rancor.

The sabots dragged to the door, paused a moment and then there came a mild rap. Elton unlocked the door to admit the withered old Gaul who brought their meals. The Frenchman murmured an apologetic greeting and ambled towards the rough little washstand that served as dining table.

"Ah, *monsieur,*" Elton exclaimed delightfully, eyeing the tray of food and speaking for McGee's benefit. "I see you have brought us your delicious chocolate with saccharine, black bread and nice, fresh eggs. This is excellent, *monsieur.* Please we will set the table over—"

The Frenchman lurched suddenly forward and the tray crashed to the floor. Elton's first thought was that the man had been seized by a stroke. An instant later, the old man collapsed to the floor and lay writhing, hands clutched at his stomach, eyes distended and glassy, a greenish foam welling from purple lips.

Elton dropped to his knees, felt the stricken man's pulse, and shook his head. McGee came anxiously from the window.

"Looks serious to me, Cap'n," he exclaimed. "Hadn't we better get word out for a doctor?"

"I'm afraid there's nothing any doctor can do," Elton replied somberly.

He rose slowly, went to the door and locked it, then lifted the Frenchman's frail figure to the bed.

"He'll be dead in a few minutes, McGee. And there's no antidote we can get against a cyanide dose. Therefore it would be empty sentiment to send for a doctor—and we can't afford that risk just at present."

"Poisoned? I don't understand, Cap'n.

Why would anyone want to kill off that poor old fellow?"

"Probably no one. Purely an accident, Lieutenant. But it isn't hard to believe that someone might want to kill two men to whom the old gentleman was carrying supper. It is evident, McGee, that he liked that chocolate better than you do—and took a few sips on the way upstairs."

McGee's jaws slowly closed and a sparkle of grim vitality gleamed in his black eyes. He nodded comprehension.

"Then there is a fox in that hole after all, Cap'n," he said.

"Obviously," Elton replied quietly. "And he has got us to windward. Now get back to that window—and keep your eyes open."

CHAPTER II

A MESSAGE IN CIPHER

ELTON stood for a time with his hand at the Frenchman's pulse. Life was all but extinct, it was but a matter of moments until actual death occurred. Doubtless, had he been able to speak, the old man would have asked the ministrations of a priest. Elton turned with a deep pang of regret and left the Frenchman, now in a state of coma, to his final moments of mortal existence.

Carefully he searched the room. Luckily there were no apertures except the keyhole and this Elton closed with his handkerchief. Von Straef's agents, he argued, would soon divine what had happened. Failure of the Frenchman to return downstairs might warn them of that. And they could be depended upon to lose no time in planning a second coup now that the Prussian shadows had sensed two Allied agents in waiting.

Elton laid out his gas mask, and McGee's. Both were in uniform and armed with service pistols, four extra clips of ammunition apiece, and two small French hand grenades which the Deuxieme Bureau had forced upon them for possible emergency. But Elton knew that the only immediate danger was from von Straef's skulkers who might attempt to inject poison gas into the room. Once they left this hole there might be other dangers. The secret war on Montross Street raged in deadly earnest with no trick or wile omitted.

Elton returned shortly to the stricken Frenchman. The pulse was now the veriest murmur. It stopped, like the ticking of an unwound watch, in a fitful flurry. Elton waited a moment and covered the body with a blanket, racked by the necessity that had let the old man die without benefit of friend or clergy. A flood of sympathy swept him for the old woman below who had prepared their meals. He knew he did not dare carry word down to her of the tragedy. Ordinary precaution dictated that she must not be told even if she came upstairs to inquire what had become of her husband.

Elton's mouth tightened. He must leave the old woman to the horror of discovery alone, after they had gone. In her mind, his death would be associated with those two strange boarders. For Elton held no slightest suspicion that the old French couple even remotely suspected the sinister conflict that raged under cover of Rue Montross. But he would be able to report the circumstances to the French—and the old woman would be taken care of. And the French, moreover, would add the murder to the score von Straef would have to settle one day.

"American soldier coming down the street," McGee reported from the shutters. "A lieutenant. Wears the patch of a front-line division on his shoulder. Looks to me like one of those three-day-pass birds on a Paris rubberneck tour."

Elton went to the window. The American officer was walking at a leisurely gait and looking about him curiously, as if in search of some unfamiliar

number. There was one significant detail that McGee had not reported. The officer wore web pistol belt and sidearms, indicating a duty status. Also Elton thought the officer's uncertainty of destination appeared somewhat exaggerated.

"Looks to me like he's going into Oudert's," McGee spoke up with alarm in his voice. "That'll be the end of him, Cap'n. What is it, some damn fool M.P., snooping in where he don't know the danger!"

"May be," Elton mused. "Or again it may not be."

Pausing only to study the number, the man in American uniform ostentatiously walked into Oudert's. In this manner there had been no slightest effort at concealment of his destination.

"Anyhow he seemed to know where he was going, Cap'n," said McGee, "and he was making no bones about it."

"Which may mean nothing or a great deal," said Elton. "In any event, McGee, we're leaving here the minute that man comes out of Oudert's—if he ever comes out. Get your things together."

"That's music to me, Cap'n. But do you think—"

"Something about that officer told me I want to have a little talk with him, McGee. But we may not have clear sailing getting out of this hole in a hurry."

"I'd like to see anything or anybody stop us!" McGee exclaimed determinedly.

Ten minutes ticked slowly by, fifteen. McGee twisted and squirmed in anxious anticipation, Elton sat patiently composed with his eyes levelled on Oudert's. Nearly half an hour had passed, the August twlight had deepened into darkness, when the pulses of both leaped at sight of the unknown American nonchalantly leaving the cafe across Rue Montross and swinging back up the street in the same leisurely unconcern.

"Keep your gas mask handy and your pistol ready!" Elton warned. "We're on our way and we're moving fast!"

"Yes'r," McGee affirmed with enthusiasm.

They hung their gas masks over their necks, caught up their service pistols and went softly but swiftly down the narrow black stairs, Elton ahead and lighting the way with intermittent rays of his flashlight, McGee close behind with pistol and grenade ready for instant emergency. The way out led, by a devious black course through a network of dank old wine rookeries, to a parallel old street a hundred meters distant.

It was through this covert entrance they had been ushered to their lookout billet by a trusted agent of the Deuxieme Bureau. But Elton held no slightest doubt that the way was equally familiar to von Straef's thugs and shadows. They were passing through a black segment of tunnelling, halfway to their destination, when Elton stopped abruptly and held his breath as he gasped a sharp warning.

"Don't breathe, McGee! Gas mask!"

The long finger of light from his flashlight had shown Elton clear terrain ahead. But the sharp sting in his nostrils, as of two red-hot needles thrust suddenly into them, had given him the warning. He paused for several minutes, playing his flashlight ahead, his eyes blinded by tears from the pain, until he could recover his bearings.

"Got your eyes back?" he demanded of McGee.

"Sure, Cap'n. Only a whiff—gas mask all set."

"Let's go!"

Elton led the way at a slower pace, playing his flashlight on every nook and cranny ahead of him, ready to fire at the slightest movement. He feared no open attack. Von Straef's skulkers would seek some sly advantage from cover, he argued. But an instant later his light caught the dark outlines of a figure crouched in a recess.

In the brief instant that the impulse of violence was transmitted to Elton's

brain, the alert McGee, expert pistol marksman, sensed the omen and fired instinctively. Elton's pistol roared a fraction of a second later. In the blurred scene that followed they caught the forward pitch of a bulky shadow, a guttural oath of pain, and the roll of a small dark cylinder into the course ahead of them.

Elton leaped forward and kicked the grenade aside. Both ran forward. Their assailant had pulled the ring of the deadly missile before he collapsed. But it exploded a dozen paces behind them. McGee swore ferociously above the detonation. Twice he turned in a blind fury and tossed his own grenades into the dark recesses behind him. A minute later they emerged breathlessly into the street.

"Hit?" Elton demanded, whipping off his gas mask and breathing deeply.

"Nothing much—just a nick in the neck," McGee responded vigorously. "Set your own pace, Cap'n. I'll stay with you!"

A short run put them into an intersecting street through which they emerged into Rue Montross. The man in American uniform was just entering a cab. He made no attempt at flight as Elton called after him and hurried up, McGee trailing close behind.

"You wanted to speak to me?" the visitor from Oudert's inquired with easy unconcern.

"We want a ride with you back into civilized Paris," Elton exclaimed agreeably.

"Glad to oblige, buddies," the other responded. "Climb right in. There's plenty of room for three. I'm Lieutenant Koenig, 905th United States Infantry. Down to Paris on a little matter of business. Nice village the French have here, isn't it?"

The cab rumbled over cobblestones at an easy speed. Lieutenant Koenig held the role of agreeable host. But Elton held him under an alert eye and when they came into the district of traffic, insisted upon changing to a cab of his own selection. Koenig objected curtly.

"This cab suits me," he said. "If you don't like the way it runs you're welcome to take another."

"Sorry, Lieutenant," Elton rejoined. "Matter of precaution. Military Intelligence wishes to talk things over with you—and I hope you'll come along decently."

Koenig stared for a moment, then broke into a hearty laugh.

"Glad to oblige," he acceded. "Say, but this will be something funny to tell the boys at the front. Me taken prisoner in the great battle of Paris, by the American military police. All right, buddies, I'm with you."

AT headquarters Koenig's easy humor and sureness of himself combined convincingly with the completeness of his orders and his explanation of his visit to Oudert's. His company commander had sent him to Paris to look for a deserter who had gotten away with company funds. He had made the rounds of riverfront dives in Paris because the deserter was a Mississippi riverman. A French M.P. had told him of the Oudert dive on Rue Montross. He'd gone there, found nothing suspicious, and come away.

"I must insist," Koenig said finally, "that you call up my division headquarters at Gerardmer in the Vosges! My detention here is funny up to a certain point. But it ceases to be a joke when I tell you I must report back for duty by midnight tomorrow. I've never been late yet and I do not intend to break that record."

"You're entirely right," Elton assured placidly. "We've made lots of mistakes—and this may be another one. I'll call Gerardmer at once."

"Thank you," said Koenig and complacently lighted a cigarette.

With a significant glance at a trusted sergeant, Elton left Koenig behind to be searched by the noncom. In his own

office he turned his attention to Lieutenant McGee, whose military collar was caked with blood. He critically examined the jagged gash on McGee's neck.

"Just as I said, Cap'n," McGee protested. "It's nothing much. I'll wash it up after while and change my blouse."

"A close call, McGee. Get right on over to the hospital and get a shot of anti-tetanus."

"Looks to me like that bird we caught was all a boner, eh, Cap'n?" McGee changed the subject. "But after what happened, I'm for rooting out that nest at Oudert's right away quick."

"We're staying right here for a few hours. You get your neck dressed and get some rest at your billet. If anything develops I'll send out for you."

"All right, Cap'n, if that's an order," McGee grumbled.

From down the corridor Elton heard the stout protests of the suspect at the indignity of search. Elton knew that search would be thorough. It would encompass hair, teeth, moles. Koenig's shoes would be taken apart and put together again, the lining and padding of his uniform would be looked into.

Elton placed two calls over the military lines, one to Koenig's Divison P.C. in the Vosges, the other to the Central records office at Bourges. Division promptly identified Koenig's presence in Paris on official business. The commandant at Bourges agreed to send a fast courier to Paris with the Koenig personnel records, including finger prints.

Two hours later Elton's sergeant reported findings. Koenig's search had been thorough and complete. Even the mechanism of his service pistol had been taken down. There was nothing. Moreover, Koenig was now demanding his prompt release, threatening written complaint to G.H.Q., against this absurd interference with his official duties.

An hour later the courier arrived with the records from Bourges. Koenig's German descent was plainly recorded. That meant nothing since there were thousands of loyal German-Americans in the ranks. Moreover the finger prints checked out. Therefore Koenig was Koenig, duly commissioned lieutenant in the 905th United States Infantry and not a masquerader.

Elton dismissed the sergeant with a glum nod. The evidence had gone against him. But Elton had learned that in the fast and subtle game of the secret service the trails of spies are disclosed more often by some whim of manner or expression, some unnatural response to immediate surroundings, some exaggerated reaction of nerves to question or incident.

And to his mind, Koenig's visit to Oudert's might be fully and logically explained by the fellow's story and orders, yet the manner of Koenig's approach to the place did not ring true. Koenig's story was logical, his record checked out. But his response to his arrest did not. Another straw had been the fellow's instant gaping interest in the wound at McGee's neck. Koenig had been at the point of asking about the wound, then had changed his mind. Elton had watched that play and, obscure as the incident might appear, it had added another straw to his suspicions.

In minute detail Elton checked over the whimsical substance of his whole case. There stood out the fact that Koenig had spent nearly half an hour in Oudert's place—and had emerged without harm. What was Koenig's real mission there, if on the business of the Imperial secret service? He studied the fellow's face and personality. A keen, cool man, well above the average in intelligence and of the gentleman caste. Just the type of a German army reservist, one of the sort fed through the Mexican border into the United States to try for commission through the officers' training camps. Scores of German agents had worked that game successfully.

But Koenig was not the type for an important spy executive. Rather the man for important courier duty in transmitting messages or handling a small spy team. His brief presence down from the front testified to that type of service, if any.

Elton checked over the details of Koenig's search, and his mind centered upon the fellow's sidearms. That had been another incongruous note. He rang for the sergeant and directed that the Koenig belt and weapon be brought to his desk. The sergeant's search had been thorough, even to complete examination of texture of the web belt. Elton removed the clip from the butt of the pistol and examined the ball cartridges under a glass. Ordinary service ammunition, in perfect order. In fact, just a bit too perfect and shiny.

"I want those shells taken apart and thoroughly examined," he instructed his sergeant. "Even the composition of the bullets. Let me know the result as promptly as possible."

The sergeant was back in half an hour, his face tense with excitement.

"Found these, sir, under four of the slugs," he announced, placing four waxen pellets on Elton's desk.

The sergeant had removed the wax from one of the pellets, disclosing a thin onion skin paper covered with tiny symbols. Elton picked up the cipher message and examined it with rising pulse.

McGee came in from hospital, his neck dressed, the stains removed from his blouse.

"Recognize that, Lieutenant?" Elton demanded exultingly.

McGee scowled at the message a moment.

"German cipher, Cap'n. Plain as day. Where'd you get that thing?"

"No matter," said Elton indifferently. "But in the meantime we owe Koenig an abject apology."

Elton replaced the broken clip with a clip from his own pistol and led the way into the room where the suspect was pacing the floor under guard.

"I'm terribly sorry about this whole stupid affair, Lieutenant Koenig," Elton apologized. "In releasing you I want to offer my most sincere apologies and hope you will accept them."

Koenig glared malevolence.

"If I had not been detained so unreasonably long, I might consider an apology sufficient," he said in crisp affront. "As it is I'll be compelled to register official complaint in writing at this outrage!"

"But I hope you'll not feel that way about it, Lieutenant," Elton placated. "We all make mistakes—and this one was made in good faith. We were under orders to pick up anyone entering Oudert's. Can't we forget and just call it a day's work? I apologize again and my lieutenant and men apologize with me."

"All right, let it go at that this time," Koenig yielded. "At least I'll get back on time by catching the early morning express."

"That's very gracious of you, Lieutenant," said Elton. "Good night, sir."

CHAPTER III

MASQUERADE

ELTON, his features cast in cool intensity, hurried back to his office. With composed deliberation he pared the wax covering from the three cipher pellets and laid the four pieces of paper under a strong magnifying glass. A German transposition cipher—and coming from von Straef's rendezvous, probably not a simple cipher to break down, he concluded.

"You didn't tell me where you got those things, Cap'n," McGee complained.

"Plenty of time for that," Elton rejoined without looking up. "The first order of business is to find out what they mean. While I'm doing that, get some

sleep. You may need it before we're through with this case."

"Something we're going out on pronto, Cap'n?" McGee asked eagerly.

"May be moving first thing in the morning. All depends on how long it takes to get this cipher. Now clear out. I'll send for you as soon as we're ready."

"I'll do my sleeping in a chair in the orderly room. Handy if you want me. Good luck with the Dutch riddle."

Painstakingly, Elton transferred the tiny symbols to a large sheet of paper and settled down to the racking task of breaking the messages into readable text. If a recently intercepted German cipher, one that had been effectively broken by the cryptographers at American G.H.Q., was still being used by von Straef, Elton knew that he could solve the riddle in a few hours. Otherwise days might be required, precious days that could not be spared in the present critical situation.

For some time he studied the arrangement and sequence of symbols in the cipher message. The four von Straef documents, pieced together, read:

PENAR	CPFTI	QEVAT	ENBLA
TKQFO	ARENE	UIPEP	FUKXI
LCNFQ	EPCVB	TAWAO	BNCOE
TINDW	BNARD	QFOFN	BVCPE
PGVGP	AVAPB	PFOAO	BSCLB
VBTFW	ANEWB	TCSDN	FMANA
OEVAR	ARCTK	QENBM	BQFVE
VBXKO	APETB	UIPFO	FQELE
OBRDR	BQFUA	WASCU	KLFPE
WBOCO	DNAME	LGVFV	ANCND
MFNBV	DTDLE	PFVIT	IQEQF
OCOAU	CLFLA	OBMEP	ENASD
LBTKL	HNEPD	PHLI.	

From the simple key that had unlocked the lately broken German system, Elton attempted a solution. It failed. With a groan he settled down to the endless juggling of letters that he knew lay ahead. He was convinced that the cipher system had not been changed. Nothing more than the key sequence. For even von Straef, operating in Paris, must use a cipher system that he could carry in his memory. Such a thing as a code book for enciphered code was not discreet, even in the von Straef entrenchment under Paris.

Elton set out to establish the high-frequency letters in the message. For, whether the letter "E" is carried as an "E" or is represented by any other letter, it will shortly betray itself in the frequency with which it appears in the composition of words. So, too, are other high-frequency letters to be established by patient tabulation and computation, no matter what the cipher arrangement. Such letters as T, A, O, I, and N. And by the same rule the low-frequency letters, W,X,Y, and Z, unmask themselves before the pitiless inquisition of the cryptographer.

An hour of work and Elton located tentatively the probable letters E, T and N as being represented by the cipher symbols O, Q, and R. He also, within that time, had convinced himself that the message would reduce into English rather than German or French. The one previously intercepted von Straef message had been in English symbols, obviously to confound the French secret service in a slip-up.

Dawn saw Elton working feverishly. The cipher, he now saw, was an adaptation of the cipher to which he held the key. The sun was just rising over Paris when the last odd end of the alphabetical tangle fitted into place. His final worksheet of the broken key read:

	L M	N O	P Q	R S	T U	V W	X Z
AB	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
CD	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
EF	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
GH	Y	Z	1	2	3	4	5
IK	6	7	8	9	A	B	C

With this formula it was a simple task to write out the message von Straef had dispatched to Wilhelmstrasse. The letters outside the squares made up the cipher symbols, the letters at the top indicating the column in which the true letter intended was located, the letter to the left

placing the row and thus precisely fixing the true letter by triangulation.

Thus the symbols L or M meant that the letter transmitted was in the first column of squares and the letters A or B meant that it was in the first row of squares. That gave the true letter D. By the same process the letter B was represented by the symbol letters V or W and I or K, the letter C by the symbols X or Z and I or K, and thus through the alphabet.

Elton reduced the letters to their English equivalent, with the following result:

TENTATIVEDATEUSAT
TACKSTMIHIELSALIEN
TSEPTI4FIFTEENDIVIS
IONSDESIGNATEDTWIC
ETHATSTRENGTHINART
ILLERYWILLREPORTBA
TTLEORDERTENDAYS—
M16

A few strokes of his pencil, dividing the letters into word lengths, and von Straef's message stood out in clear English:

Tentative date U. S. attack St. Mihiel salient Sept. 14. Fifteen divisions designated, twice that strength in artillery. Will report battle order ten days.—M16.

Elton's mouth hardened. Von Straef could not have recorded the American battle intentions more accurately had he been sitting in with the trusted few who were perfecting those plans for pinching off the great German salient at St. Mihiel.

With a glance at his wrist watch, Elton hurried out into the street to hail a motorcab. Colonel Rand, American espionage chief who had come down from G.H.Q. to sit in on the von Straef quest, was due at Paris headquarters in perhaps an hour. But Elton knew that such a disclosure must not wait. There was action to be taken and taken at once while the von Straef trail was hot.

The colonel was breakfasting at his Paris billet in the Hotel Meurice when Elton arrived. Without preliminary, Elton thrust the deciphered Prussian message into Rand's hand. The colonel started as he scanned the missive.

"Where did you get this thing!" Rand demanded.

"From the pistol-clip of an American officer, sir," Elton reported. "It came out of von Straef's nest down on Rue Montross."

"But—but—why, it doesn't seem possible, Elton, that von Straef or anyone else could have learned those things. Damn it, man, that's accurate. The Army does attack to pinch off the St. Mihiel salient—and on September 14th. No secret was ever more carefully guarded!"

"Evidently not carefully enough, Colonel. I don't know how von Straef got his information—but he got it."

"You say you found this on the person of an American officer?"

"Yes, sir. A lieutenant named Koenig. Obviously a German agent who crossed the Mexican border and qualified for commission in an officers' training camp. He was in Paris on American orders. McGee and I were laying on Oudert's, as you directed, when we saw him go in. We picked him up as he came out."

"That was luck," Rand exclaimed with a glow of excitement. "How much is the fellow willing to spill?"

"I didn't attempt to question him, Colonel. As I estimated the fellow's type, that would be a waste of time."

"We'll see about that. You have him under competent guard at headquarters?"

"No, sir. I imagine he must be well on his way back to his regiment in the Vosges front lines by now. As soon as I uncovered the ciphers, I apologized to him and turned him loose."

"You—you did what? Elton, what do you mean?"

"There was no time to report to you, sir. I took the responsibility of releasing

him—rather than run any risk of having him suspect what I knew."

"But—but, hang it, Captain, he'll suspect something when he finds the cipher messages are gone! What kind of reasoning do you—"

"I thought of that, Colonel. But the manner in which the messages were concealed convinced me their loss will not be discovered until Koenig's bullets are uncased in Germany. By that time I hope to have done—something. In any event, sir, it seemed to me the only course I could follow."

"Do you overlook the fact that this is evidence enough to send that fellow straight to a firing squad, Elton!"

"No doubt of that, Colonel. But I thought we'd want to play this trail through a lot further than one lone agent. What I came for is authority to proceed at once into the Vosges sector. Such a masquerader as Koenig must have an organization—and his trail offers interesting possibilities, sir."

Colonel Rand scowled meditatively and massaged his long blunt nose with a fat forefinger, his favorite thought-provoking gesture. Finally his eyes sparkled at the prospect Elton pictured, of a flush haul of German agents entrenched in the American front lines, a courier ring for the transmission of German reports from Paris. For if stripped of his present line of communication, von Straef would be little more than a trapped rat under Paris so far as feeding Allied secrets to the Prussian high command was concerned. And by the time the Prussian could establish another clandestine line, the impending clash of St. Mihiel would be history. Therefore such a coup, if successful, was worth taking the risk of losing one prisoner.

"But Koenig may be able to identify you up there, Elton," Rand argued, his face clouding again. "I agree with you that there may be a nest of them in our Division sector in the Vosges, in which case they'll have their eyes pretty wide open."

"I'll have to take that risk, Colonel," Elton said lightly.

"What are your plans, Captain?"

"To leave immediately, sir, taking Lieutenant McGee with me. To make our presence there logical, I'd like to ask that a heavy consignment of replacements be sent to the 106th Division from the Base Depot at St. Aignan. We'll go in with them and arrange with the Division G-2 to be assigned to the Koenig platoon in the 905th Infantry—at least to his company."

"All right, Elton," Rand decided presently. "I'll O.K. your plan and arrange for the replacements. I'll be at Paris headquarters in a very few minutes."

IN HIS long game of fox and geese with the Imperial secret service, Elton had learned that disguises are risky. Except those subtle disguises that go no farther than a change of posture, gait, expression and attire. But in this instance, he knew that he must go somewhat farther than that. Koenig's alert eyes might identify at once the peculiar lightness of his hair, the pigment of his skin, the mould of his features. Consequently he returned to headquarters to apply a fast dark dye to hair and eyebrows and to change the lines of his brows. An enlisted man's uniform, of the shoddy material being furnished the A.E.F. by wild American uniform contractors, replaced his trimly tailored whipcords.

McGee suffered the loss of his beard, which he had grown for some such sacrifice. A private's uniform, that fit him sadly, added to McGee's complete transformation. And the circumstance of going into the lines with a heavy force of replacements, at a time when every Division in France was howling for replacements, was calculated to screen their masquerade, give it complete plausibility.

Nine o'clock saw them out the Porte de Bercy in a fast staff car, headed for St. Aignan. Early afternoon landed them at the replacement depot. Colonel Rand had set the wheels working; a thousand replacements were being mustered for shipment by truck. Elton and McGee reported into the base division headquarters where the G-2 officer had arranged their assignment. They had barely time to reach their position for loading before the column moved, intent on making Gerardmer, headquarters of the 106th Division in the Vosges, before daylight of the next day.

"Better forget your fine military manners, McGee," Elton warned, as the lieutenant ostentatiously changed to the captain's left on leaving for their place in the ranks. "Remember, we're both privates—and have got to stay in character at all times."

"Yes'r, but I can do that without forgetting that my cap'n is the cap'n," McGee replied.

"Don't ever say 'sir' again while we're on this job, McGee. One little slip like that up front might be expensive."

"Yes'r. I mean sure thing, Cap'n."

"And great Scott, we just passed up that lieutenant without saluting! Be careful—"

A sharp, irate voice crackling behind told them that the officer had not overlooked the affront to his dignity. Both halted in their tracks and faced about at the outraged man's command.

"How long you two men been in the service?" the officer demanded, glaring them over.

"Quite a while—sir," Elton spoke up.

"Ever been taught how to salute an officer?"

"Yes, sir. Sorry we did not see the lieutenant, sir."

"Well, see to it you keep your eyes open, after this. We're trying to teach you men to be soldiers and not rowdies, and you can't be soldiers and go around with your eyes half open. You will salute me again. That's all!"

"Yes, sir," said Elton, raising his hand not too gracefully to the rim of his steel helmet.

"Of all the damned arrogance!" stormed McGee as they walked on. "How I burned to have on my silver bars long enough to burn that shavetail. Can you imagine anyone actually getting like that, Cap'n, I mean, Private Elton?"

"Probably a plumber's helper in civil life, and feeling his oats. But anyhow he paid up a high compliment, McGee. Shows we're getting by as privates."

"Sure, a colonel could get by as a private if you'd put him in one of these damn gunnysacks they make up into war uniforms," McGee muttered feelingly

A few minutes later they were merged into the ranks of a replacement infantry company, loaded in a truck with eighteen other men, and jolted over the first kilometers on the long ride to the Vosges. Elton's eye thoughtfully appraised the column. A thousand men being sent up to screen the movements of two secret agents. And no officer or man of the force remotely suspecting the hidden mainsprings behind this sudden shift in their lives. For the thousand men the adventure might spell anything. Death for some, wounds for others, action and hardship for all.

But that was only war, in which men are pawns. And Elton knew that as the cost sheets of war are reckoned the replacement enterprise was a small one compared with the stakes for which he played. Smoking out a spy ring in the Vosges would be an incalculable service. And if he could bring that ring into his net without the sounding of an alarm—there was the possibility, armed with the key to the von Straef cipher, of sending a baited message of his own into Germany for the special information of the Imperial staff.

CHAPTER IV

THE OUTPOST IN THE VOSGES

THE black curtain of a moonless night lay over the foothills of the Vosges as the truck column jolted over the last twisted kilometer into Gerardmer. The thousand men were detrucked and put into shelter tents under cover to await daylight, segregation and distribution among the companies of the 106th Division.

Elton easily slipped away from the detachment and made his way covertly to Division headquarters. The G-2 lieutenant colonel was asleep in billet and blinked irritably at the unannounced man in private's uniform who stirred him into wakefulness.

"Who are you and what do you want?" the Division Intelligence officer demanded.

Elton displayed his orders, which jolted the other into full wakefulness and a better humor. He sprang out of bed and pulled on a dressing gown.

"I've heard of you, Captain. I'm Colonel Gorman. But what brings you up here?"

"A very strong suspicion that the Imperial secret service is routing its messages through your lines," Elton replied. "Sorry to get you out at this unearthly hour, sir, but I've got to complete my work at headquarters before daylight."

Colonel Gorman stared incredulously.

"That—that doesn't sound possible, Captain!" he protested. "We have a perfectly organized and actively functioning division Intelligence service. In fact, we'd thought of just such a possibility because of the hilly country and closeness of our trenches to the Germans. There are points where the opposing lines aren't more than thirty yards apart. But we've found nothing suspicious."

"No reflection at all intended upon your division, sir," Elton quickly assured. "This appears to be part of the von Straef organization and you probably know that fellow entrenches pretty deeply."

"Yes, but—well, what is it you suspect, Elton?"

"Do you happen to know anything about Lieutenant Koenig of your 905th Infantry?"

"Koenig? Name's vaguely familiar. But with twenty-five thousand officers and men in the outfit, scattered over fifteen miles of front, it's difficult to place junior officers. Perhaps I'd better dress and take you over to the P.C. where we can check up on the records."

"Thank you," said Elton.

Through the next hour Elton studied the division records and asked many questions. Outwardly everything seemed very much in order throughout the area. There had been nothing that might ordinary excite suspicion. But there were several bits of information to give substance to Elton's worst suspicions. Koenig commanded the right outpost platoon of his regiment in a broken Vosges fastness. And Koenig's unit, L Company, had been on duty in the outpost for a month at that point, upon the request of Koenig's company commander, who spurned relief from the position for his officers and men.

Elton centered his questions upon L Company. Koenig had been with that outfit since the division was organized in the United States. The company commander, a Captain Millard, had been assigned as a casual officer after the division's arrival in France. The day he reported there had arisen a line vacancy, due to the accidental death of the original commander of L Company, who inadvertently had pulled the ring of a hand grenade. There had been no witnesses to the tragedy, but a board of officers had determined the probable facts of accidental death. And Millard had turned out to be an outstanding company com-

mander. He'd even had a chance for promotion to major recently, Gorman said, but had declined promotion out of a wish to remain with his company.

Elton's eyes kindled over these homely disclosures. A significant chain of events, he thought.

"Did you ever consider the idea that the captain of L Company might have been murdered, Colonel?" Elton inquired.

"You mean by a member of his command who held some grudge? No, he had the good will of all his men to an unusual degree."

"I mean by someone interested in wanting a new captain."

"No—there was nothing to suggest that. I see what you're driving at, Elton. But I can't believe Millard a German agent. I've studied the past history of every one of our company commanders. Millard's is that of a typical loyal American. I'll let you look it over."

Elton's brows converged over the Millard personal card. A long American ancestry was established. The fellow had been born and raised in a mid-western state, graduated from the local university and was a member of the city council in the city of his birth.

"I'll agree that this man couldn't conceivably be in the Imperial secret hire," he commented. "But you say he came to you as a casual officer overseas. Will you do me a special service, Colonel?"

"We are directed to cooperate with you in every way possible, Captain."

"Then please have some officer, say of field grade, drop in on Millard in the morning on some plausible mission." Elton took from his pocket a silver cigarette case, wrapped in a silk handkerchief, and handed it to Gorman. "Have your man give Millard a cigarette out of this case."

"Of course, but what's the point, Elton?"

"That case is coated in minium, Colonel. That will record his finger prints without arousing his suspicion. As soon as you get the prints and develop them, I want them rushed by officer courier to the Central Records office at Bourges for comparison with the Millard finger prints taken at the time of his commission."

"You don't suspect that Millard is an imposter! Why, that doesn't seem credible."

"I merely want to clear up the point, sir. Just such things have happened. It would have only taken two murders to turn that trick. And now, Colonel, if you'll arrange for Lieutenant McGee and me to be assigned to L Company, I'll be getting back to my place in ranks while it's still dark. Good night, sir."

McGee was peacefully asleep when Elton slipped into the bivouac. Elton lay down for a snatch of sleep, but was routed out in less than half an hour by orders to fall in with the first light of dawn. The detachment was checked and ordered to make breakfast on the emergency rations carried in their packs.

"What you find out?" McGee inquired sotto voice as they munched hard bread and corned beef. "Where do we go from here?"

"Everything's arranged. But when we leave here I rather suspect we're going into mighty ticklish terrain. Yes, if I'm not badly mistaken, we'd be safer in Berlin than down there in that Koenig outpost."

"Well, that's something to give some flavor to this awful chow," McGee rejoined. "Life's looking brighter."

THE commander of L Company appeared to accept as a matter of ordinary routine the twelve replacement soldiers who were reported to his P. C. in the outpost trenches shortly after stand-to. Captain Millard was a trim, well-knit officer with clear-cut, unemotional features and cold, level gray eyes. A born soldier, Elton thought; at least one born of the officer caste. There was nothing Teuton

in the shape of his head or the set of his features. Neither was he typically American. Rather, Elton saw, the captain was of the peculiar type that has no distinctive national characteristics—which is the type from which the best spies are selected.

Millard's terse examination of his new men was immediately reassuring. His few questions were purely technical. How much service? What special training in scouting and patrolling? In grenades, and rifle marksmanship? But there was an inner alertness in his inquisition. Elton's quick perceptions caught this when Millard promptly segregated the twelve, eight to the left of his company, four to the right. And the four selected for Koenig's platoon, picked with unerring judgment, were those who loomed above the others in intelligence.

"Report these four men to Lieutenant Koenig!" the captain instructed a sergeant. "Tell him I'm giving him the best of the lot, so he ought to be satisfied."

In Elton's composed features there was no hint of his inner conflict at this turn of events. Among twelve replacements, fed casually into L Company, he had counted upon entrenching himself, catching the lay of the land and planning a trap for Koenig under cover of a sure masquerade. But as one of four men reported direct to the German masquerader, Elton knew that he faced a precarious risk at the very outset of his adventure in the Vosges.

"Watch your tongue, and see that you don't look at Koenig with that level glare of yours!" he warned McGee in a whispered aside as they were marched down the outpost trench to the right flank position. "We're going on mighty thin ice now."

A few minutes later they were escorted into a small dank dugout occupied by a solitary figure in olive drab serge, seated over an empty ammunition case penning a morning military report. Half a dozen candles, held in the necks of empty beer bottles, etched the cold, hard features of Koenig.

"Reporting four replacements from the cap'n," droned the sergeant.

Koenig completed his report, blotted it, folded it into an envelope and handed it to the sergeant before noticing the four new members of his command.

Koenig's eyes swept lightly over the four men and centered on the recruit at the right of the four as he launched his inquiry into that soldier's military qualifications for front line duty. Elton felt a momentary hope. At least Koenig had not detected him instantly. But would his thin disguise, mere change of uniform, posture and expression of face, see him through the ordeal of personal interview which would follow in a moment?

Elton held himself under perfect control as he found himself looking into Koenig's searching eyes. He clung to the mental attitude of a raw replacement, answered Koenig's questions without too much firmness, looked back at his quarry with eyes that blinked with just the right degree of timidity. But his mind was alert for the slightest token. In the veriest play of Koenig's eyebrows might come a warning—an unintentional warning that Koenig saw his danger.

But Koenig's face remained an unperturbed mask. His attitude seemed coldly impersonal as he questioned Elton. He passed quickly on to McGee, the fourth man of the squad. McGee he passed over even more quickly, more casually. Then Koenig's hard humor seemed to thaw slightly. He smiled thinly.

"Glad to welcome you men to the first platoon," he said. "It's a fine outfit and I know you'll be proud of your platoon. I'll have you made comfortable. As soon as possible I'll have some interesting duty for you." He turned to shout to a corporal, who appeared instantly at the dugout entrance. "Corporal Schmidt will see that you're taken care of. That's all!"

The four replacements were escorted

out promptly by the corporal, a beefy, red-faced noncom with expressionless features of distinctly Teuton markings. He escorted them to a small dank dugout under the forward trenches in the first platoon strongpoint.

"Stay under cover till you're called for," the corporal ordered. "Chow'll be up about noon. Police up your equipment and make up your bunks. Maybe there won't be much for you but bunk fatigue till tonight. No loud talking. That's all!"

McGee, busy laying out blankets and equipment, caught Elton's eye with a whimsical wink.

"Close pinch that one," he said in a guarded whisper. "But we slipped past that time slick as oil."

"Maybe," Elton rejoined dubiously.

For his own part Elton was racked with uncertainty. While there had been no outward show of recognition in Koenig's actions, yet Elton had caught a slight contraction of the Koenig eyes in that brief moment they were fixed upon him. Which might mean nothing or might mean everything. And the promptness in which Koenig had thereafter ended the interview was another token. Or was all this the product of his own inner tension, Elton asked himself.

Carefully he reviewed every instant of that terse interview in Koenig's dugout, every word and action. Koenig's whole conduct might have reassured another man, even one who had detected that slight hardening of the Koenig eyes. But Elton knew that such a man as Koenig could be counted upon to have his emotions closely in hand, even be able to mask the shock of recognizing two American secret agents in his dugout. Certainly that would be Koenig's only way out, a show of innocent unconcern the while he laid his own counter-trap. Finally Elton shook his head over the puzzle.

"You'd better get all the sleep you can today," he whispered to McGee. "Tonight I may want some sleep. But one of us must stay awake at all times. If Koenig is suspicious, we'll not have long to wait before something happens."

CHAPTER V

THE MIDNIGHT PATROL

THE day's developments lent no substance to Elton's suspicions. In fact everything went ahead precisely as it should in an outpost position in the Vosges. Koenig was much in evidence up and down his strongpoint but seemed wholly occupied with military details and paid no further attention to his four recruits. Noon mess was brought up and ladled out in messkits. Supper came up in the same way at sundown. An occasional rifle shot broke the stillness as snipers potted at one another across the verdant reaches of No Man's Land. Otherwise little happened.

Elton, loitering about outside his dugout, took careful observations over the terrain in which he must bait his trap for Koenig. Except for trenches, helmeted soldiers and intermittent sniping, there was little here to suggest the flaming war that raged from Switzerland to the North Sea. Beyond the outpost was a protecting barrier of tangled barbed wire, beyond that grassy slopes and swales, lightly shell-pocked. A distant discoloration betrayed the sunken German outposts, at this point perhaps 600 yards distant. In front and behind rose the towering hills of the Vosges. Wild canaries chirped lustily in the warm sunshine, small squirrels and woodrats scurried back and forth casting an occasional furtive look at these strange creatures in olive drab who had come to share their cloistered domain.

There was even less on the surface to hint the stark intrigue that lay under the surface, the under-cover war of the secret service. Soldiers stood at the alert

along Koenig's trench. Koenig himself bustled about checking details with precise care. To the casual eye here was a loyal American platoon, efficiently led, ready at an instant's notice to come to grips with the Teuton monster.

Elton wondered how many of these soldiers were Koenig's henchmen. Few showed hints of German lineage. But Elton knew that carefully selected men could be fed into Koenig's service here with a minimum of risk. And if Captain Millard was in the German service, the two officers would be able to dominate the whole outpost with their masqueraders.

Night deepened without event. Sniping ceased. Artillery growled fitfully in the distance, but in this sector there was profound silence. Elton awakened McGee, turned over the vigil to him and turned in for sleep. But in what seemed the next moment he was awakened by the strident voice of Corporal Schmidt.

"Roll out and make it snappy!" Schmidt commanded. He held out a can of brown grease. "Here, smear up your faces so they won't show in the starlight. Move fast, we're going out on the midnight patrol!"

Six dark shadows were waiting outside the dugout. Elton, McGee and the other two replacements fell in place as the patrol moved off down the trench led by Schmidt. Elton, instantly on guard, maneuvered for position at the rear of the detachment, with McGee next ahead of him.

"Watch your step, McGee, and keep close to me no matter what happens," Elton cautioned.

As the patrol came to the jump-off point through the wire entanglements, Schmidt halted them and gave terse instructions to the four new men.

"Keep your ears open and your mouths shut," he muttered. "We're just making the rounds to see if the Heinies are up to anything. At any loud noises and machine guns, open up. All orders by signal. Come on, follow me."

As the patrol crept through the wire and maneuvered slowly out into the forbidden domain of No Man's Land, Elton held himself coolly alert, ready for the slightest show of treachery. Whether Koenig had recognized him or not, Koenig meant to deliver his four replacements over as prisoners. That purpose was unmasked by sending the four men on patrol, a duty reserved for seasoned veterans and specially selected men. And that deduction being true, Elton knew that Schmidt's midnight patrol must be made up of Koenig's trusted agents, who would not stop short of any violence in carrying out their secret orders.

But, precarious as the risks ahead, he knew that he did not dare balk at taking the chance. To turn back now, before Koenig's men showed their hand, would unmask his mission. And Elton grimly resolved that the success of that mission, no matter how slender the chances of success, was more important than his life.

The patrol made its way by a twisted route that gained headway slowly. Every few minutes they were halted to listen. Elton, taking his bearings from the stars and carefully observant of every step, saw that they were maneuvering steadily away from the American outpost trenches. By counting his steps he reckoned the exact distance as they traveled across that 600-yard void to the German front-line trenches. An hour put them out 500 yards. Schmidt covered the next hundred more boldly. Another series of maneuvers and Elton estimated the German lines lay not more than a hundred meters away.

Schmidt suddenly halted his patrol and gave whispered instructions. Six were to proceed in one direction, four another. Elton and McGee were selected to go with the corporal and one of his men. Elton smiled grimly as the four moved off. It was not difficult to guess

the hidden purpose of that division. Two of the prisoners were to be delivered at one point, two at another. Thus no chances would be taken of any escaping when the German trap was sprung.

They proceeded now a step at a time, Schmidt leading, Elton and McGee immediately behind him, the fourth man bringing up the rear. They halted in a large shell crater, where Schmidt gave final instructions.

"The enemy trenches are 300 yards due ahead," he said. "You two will crawl on about fifty meters. If you find or hear nothing, come back. We will cover another area. We will meet here in ten minutes, then go back. That's all we got to do for tonight. Now be careful and don't make any noise."

Elton nodded acceptance and motioned McGee to follow as he eeled out of the crater and crawled to the front. The trap that lay ahead could not have been clearer had Koenig's henchmen warned him. Schmidt was sending them into the German trenches at a point where a German patrol lay in wait outside the German wires. And if by any chance they escaped the clutches of that patrol, their course of flight could be raked by German musketry and machine gun fire while Koenig's two henchmen lay under shelter from the storm.

Elton's instant plan of escaping the trap was as simple as the trap itself. He knew that he must play a desperate game, crawling forward until entirely out of reach of Schmidt's vision in the vague starlight, then creep away to the left, double back and make his way to the American wire. At fifty yards he turned sharply, McGee clinging to his heels, both hugging the ground and barely breathing. A hundred yards they covered in this direction, eyes and ears straining into the void. Elton's tension eased as he made ready to turn directly toward the American lines. He estimated that in another hundred yards, they would be able to take to their heels.

But in the next instant a vague premonition of shadowy danger directly in front of them broke into a grim reality. Twenty stark figures rose like black magic from the earth and closed about them. A guttural voice muttered a subdued but determined demand for their surrender. Elton saw the utter folly of flight or resistance. The trap was securely closed against violence. He leaped to his feet and raised a protesting hand.

"Be quiet—you make so much noise!" he ordered in an irritated German whisper. "Who is in command of this patrol?"

A figure stepped directly in front of him. Elton caught the face and insignia of a young grenadier subaltern.

"I come from Lieutenant Koenig with a fine lot of prisoners," Elton reported coolly. "But you will spoil everything if you make a commotion."

"We have been waiting for two men," the officer reported. "Those were my instructions."

"Koenig's plans were changed by some new replacements," Elton whispered with sharp authority. "We came forward on reconnaissance to make sure you have a large patrol and are ready. We have them waiting in a shell hole—and will send them forward immediately."

"But we were waiting at the appointed place," the lieutenant complained. His voice was that of a man who is more perplexed than suspicious. "You turned away within twenty meters of us and we were forced to make a fast circle to get in front of you, thinking you were the Americans we were looking for."

"My miscalculation, perhaps," Elton conceded. "It's hard for me to know every foot of your terrain in the dark. But there's no time for debate. Distribute yourself at this point and keep under cover. I do not intend to have another mistake—unless we wish to spoil everything!"

If the patrol leader was inclined to

suspicion in the devious realm of no man's land, Elton's cool assurance, his level show of authority, his sureness of himself and his perfect use of German, dispelled that suspicion. Moreover, the figure in American uniform had identified himself as one of Koenig's men.

"We will be ready," the German announced.

Elton turned abruptly to the rear, walking upright. His captors lost in the starlight behind, he increased his pace, carefully counting off every foot of the way. At 150 yards he stopped and dropped to the ground. Reaching the American wire in safety was a simple matter now, but Elton knew he faced a second desperate necessity. To leave Koenig's two henchmen behind meant that his mission was ruined. Schmidt would contact that patrol, learn of the trick by which the two Americans had escaped, and carry the report to Koenig. The same goaded necessity that had brought him out with the midnight patrol forged his decision.

"We've got to move in on those two waiting rascals from behind," he whispered to McGee. "If they show fight—well, we can't take any chances with them. If you fire a shot you'll start the machine guns chattering. Use your trench knife."

"Yes'r," McGee assented coolly.

THE two moved on hands and knees the next fifty yards, then lay flat and elbowed forward until Elton caught the dark outlines of their quarry rising above the rim of the shell crater. Propelling their prostrate bodies with fingers, elbows and toes, Elton and McGee reached the rim of the crater before their quarry sensed the danger behind. As Koenig's men turned, Elton and McGee vaulted in upon them.

"Don't move or—"

Elton's muttered warning was lost in Schmidt's violence. Elton, in the swift panorama of events, caught the flash of starlight on Schmidt's trench knife. His fingers were already at Schmidt's throat. He caught the other's wrist before Schmidt could sink home the blade and, with fingers of tempered steel, quickly mastered his bulky antagonist.

But McGee fared less well and went floundering into the bottom of the foxhole in a desperate struggle for his foeman's knife. And then Schmidt let out a cry with all the force of his stifled lungs. Elton knew what swift vengeance that would follow that outcry. The Prussian patrol would pour down upon them in a few minutes. Perhaps a dozen other detachments would be shoved out from the German lines. With a grim determination, Elton forced Schmidt's knife inward to the hilt and turned to McGee's assistance. The German had freed his knife hand and was at the point of driving it home when a clubbed musket in Elton's hand ended that conflict.

"Are you hurt?" Elton demanded, as McGee floundered to his feet from the bottom of the foxhole.

"Not a scratch, Cap'n," McGee reported. "But it was a close call. I—"

"Then pick that body up and follow me," Elton commanded. "We can't leave them lying here."

Elton caught up Schmidt's limp body and staggered out of the foxhole. Vaguely but unmistakably he caught the shuffle of feet coming from the direction of the German trenches. Leading the way at a clumsy run he made in the direction of the American lines, taking a diagonal course to minimize the danger of direct pursuit. Time after time the two men stumbled and fell under the awkward weight of their gruesome burdens.

A rocket leaped into the air from the German position and cast a sickly green light over the area. The two dropped flat and lay motionless until the light faded. Then Elton stumbled on to a shell crater he had located under the light of the

flare. Into this they cast the bodies of Koenig's henchmen. Elton hesitated an instant, then ran on. He knew that at any minute Hades would break loose. And the German wrath was unleashed in their wake before they had covered another dozen paces.

"Down—and stay flat!" Elton warned as a spluttering of machine gun fire swept the forbidden terrain.

There was a brief lull in the fire, time in which patrols might draw away to the flank or take cover. Elton and McGee found refuge behind a small hummock and dug feverishly with their bare hands against the coming storm. When it broke forth again it was with all the fury of a score of machine guns, systematically raking the area in which the invaders lay.

More flares leaped into the sky. American flares rose in response. No Man's Land suddenly became as light as day as both sides took up the quarrel and poured leaden rain back and forth. The volume of fire rose as the German guns worked systematically back and forth, searching their unseen human targets. The American fire was mostly flares as sentinels of the outpost line sought the meaning of this burst of fury.

Spurts of soft earth spattered Elton and McGee as the German pellets swept close in front of them. They could hear the uncanny ping of bullets screaming over them, the strident hiss of ricochets in the immediate foreground. Both lay without moving, knowing their best chance of escape was in sticking against the earth. Even the slightest motion might betray them under the strong light of the flares. And once the German gunners caught sight of a target, there could be no escape from the concentration of fire upon them.

Through ten minutes, that to the two seemed as many hours, the tempest raged. Then it stopped as fitfully as it had commenced. No Man's Land gradually lapsed back into doleful blackness. The two got up at once and stumbled ahead. A few minutes took them close to the American wire.

"That was a close one, Cap'n," McGee said in an exultant whisper, heaving a sigh of relief as Elton sat down to rest. "But we can make the American wire in another five minutes now. Hadn't we better keep moving?"

"Plenty of time, McGee," Elton replied. "Especially since we've got several hours to put in out here before going in. We must find a convenient shell hole close to the wires and take turns getting some sleep."

"But—what's the good staying out here now?" McGee protested thickly. "I don't see how that's going to buy us anything now."

"You may be right. But it seems to me it would be more plausible for us to crawl in at dawn. And I'm not sure it isn't a lot safer out here, Lieutenant. In any event, when I do go in I'd like to have the light of day on my side of this little game."

CHAPTER VI

KOENIG'S DUGOUT

WHILE Lieutenant McGee curled up against the cold hard ground and slept, Elton spent the remaining hours of the night in a cold survey of the day's events. He convinced himself that he could return to Koenig's platoon with a plausible tale. Not even the German front lines would be able to figure just what had happened. They would know only that something had gone wrong with the prisoners—and that at least two had escaped.

The night passed without disturbance. Once Elton thought he detected stealthy movement close by and guessed it was the remnant of Schmidt's patrol returning to Koenig's strongpoint in the outpost lines. With the first touch of gray

in the morning air he shook McGee into wakefulness.

"Hope you had a good sleep," he announced drily. "It may be the last you'll have soon."

"Sleep enough to last me a week, Cap'n," McGee announced cheerfully, rubbing the puffiniess out of his sunken eyes. "But I'm hungry enough to eat a crow. Where do we go from here?"

"Inside, and please remember that we suspect nothing. Our story is we got jumped by a Boche patrol and made our escape."

"You don't think Koenig's going to swallow that story, Cap'n?"

"Certainly not. But even if he knows everything, he'll think he holds the whip hand as long as we appear to be merely stringing him along."

"Sure, Cap'n," McGee muttered, wide-eyed, "and it looks to me like he does hold the whip hand. Where do we get off if he closes in on us the first thing this morning? It's a long way back to division headquarters."

"I've taken precautions against just that, McGee. Unless my plans fail Koenig will slip up at precisely the moment he clamps down on us. It involves some chances, that's part of the game. And, once more, quit calling me captain."

They made their way cautiously through the barbed wire entanglements to the jump-off trench, where the sentinels passed them without questioning. L Company was out at stand-to as Elton and McGee turned into the Koenig platoon trenches. They halted until the formation broke, then went direct to their dugout. The place was empty, had not been occupied during the night, eloquent evidence that the other two replacements were prisoners in Germany.

Elton, in stripping off his belt, examined a small hand grenade with gingerly care and slipped the explosive in his trousers pocket.

"That's no place to be carrying that thing," McGee warned. "If the ring got pulled or anything went wrong, there wouldn't be enough left to bury."

"And if the thing fails to go off when needed," Elton replied cryptically, "there may not be enough left of either of us to bury."

McGee merely shrugged, having learned the uselessness of questions. Elton volunteered such information as he wanted to pass along but otherwise was unshakeable in his secrecy.

"Maybe you'll tell me when we eat," McGee grumbled. "Just now that's the most important subject I know of."

"I'm not sure I'd eat if the morning mess included bacon and eggs," Elton rejoined with a wry smile. "Nor am I sure I'd let you touch the stuff no matter how hungry you are."

"I get the point," McGee said somberly. "But do you think Koenig could get away with poison right here in—"

Brisk footsteps outside halted McGee's speech. It was Lieutenant Koenig coming into the dugout, alone. The masquerader was cool and unfretted and seemed in a pleasant humor. He beamed pleasantly as he looked the two over.

"Glad to see you," he exclaimed. "My platoon lost four men missing last night, including Corporal Schmidt. That's hard luck enough. Glad you two escaped. What happened?"

"Sir, it was so dark we couldn't see very much," Elton reported with a show of forced excitement. "Corporal Schmidt divided his patrol and we went with him for some information. Of a sudden a German patrol surrounded us. I saw a chance to start a fight and got away in the darkness. We had trouble finding our way in, sir, and waited out until daybreak."

"Were you unable to give assistance to your patrol leader?" Koenig asked a trifle sharply.

"Sir, the corporal told us in case anything went wrong it was every man for himself."

"Of course," Koenig quickly assented.

His manner remained that of a friendly, unsuspicious platoon commander checking details of a mishap in his command. "I want to commend you both on your grit and good fortune. After you've had breakfast, you are free to get some sleep. In fact, I'll not require any duty of you today, men."

"Thanks very much, sir," Elton responded gratefully. "We're both dead for sleep—not to mention half starved."

"The rations will be up at once," Koenig reported and with a parting smile of friendly assurance turned out of the dugout.

The mess detail arrived a moment later. A private came into their dugout with steaming mess cans containing slum and coffee. Elton and McGee filled their mess kits and cups to overflow but as the orderly went out, Elton promptly took possession of McGee's kit and emptied it in a corner of the dugout. He did this with his own ration and covered the food with clay.

"I think you're getting too suspicious. Cap'n," McGee fretted, looking ruefully at the discarded breakfast. "Anyhow I'd be willing to take a chance rather'n starve to death."

"I suppose it didn't strike you as in the least unusual that our breakfast was brought to us by a special man in special cans, eh, McGee? Possibly that doesn't spell anything. But in any event Koenig isn't going to trick me with a mere cyanide."

"Well, there's plenty of better ways to get us in this hole if he's that set on it," McGee muttered.

ELTON nodded somber assent. Koenig's display of good humor was eloquent testimony of that masquerader's grim intent. Unmistakably it was a play for time, a ruse to keep his victims in hand until he could strike a fatal blow.

A sergeant came into the dugout a few minutes later, looked about, grunted, and went out. Elton guessed the purpose of that visit, an agent of Koenig's checking the effect of breakfast upon the two unwelcome guests. And if that surmise were correct, what would be Koenig's next move?

His thoughts were interrupted by a sharp outcry from McGee. At the same instant McGee went frantically into action, leaping forward to the center of the dugout while his hand scooped up a dark cylinder and in the same movement pitched it through the door. There was a deafening detonation outside. McGee seized his rifle and fed a cartridge into the barrel.

"They sure mean business, now, Cap'n!" he said with grim coolness.

There was an excited medley of voices outside. Elton thrust McGee's rifle aside as several men stormed into the dugout, led by the sergeant who had called a few minutes before.

"What the hell you think you're doing here—tossing live grenades out of your dugout!" the sergeant bellowed.

"Somebody pulled the ring on the thing and tossed it in here!" McGee shouted back. "We were just lucky to toss it back outside before it exploded!"

"Tell that to the marines—you're both under arrest!" the sergeant raged. "Come on, get moving out of here! Lieutenant Koenig'll attend to this!"

McGee, standing his ground in readiness for resistance, cast a quick glance at Elton. That officer nodded acquiescence.

"That's fine, Sergeant," he said. "All we ask is a chance to tell Lieutenant Koenig what's going on around here."

The sergeant led the way out and headed them down the trench. Elton saw that the course lay toward the end of the trench, that critical point at the flank of the regiment upon which Elton's suspicions centered. There Koenig must have his secret entrenchment, surrounded by his most trusted men. But Elton was no longer suppressed by the

sense of Koenig's advantages. The masquerader unwittingly had turned the balance against himself.

"This don't look good to me. I'm for fighting while we got a chance," McGee protested close to Elton's ear.

"A great piece of luck," Elton rejoined in a whispered aside.

As they proceeded down the trench, Elton absently tore several cigarettes to small bits, sifting the tiny fragments of paper and tobacco through his fingers as they marched. The way brought up in front of a dugout at the end of the trench. Elton dropped the remnant of torn bits of paper and went unhesitatingly inside at the sergeant's command. Koenig was seated on an empty ammunition box in the center of the timbered chamber. His mask was off, his face twisted in a sinister smile.

"Good morning, Captain Elton," he said with a level arrogance burning in his eyes. "I'm glad you brought your man McGee with you. I wanted the two of you to meet my crew here in the little trap we've spread for you."

Elton's lips spread in an easy smile, his eyes sparkled unconcern as he nodded to Koenig and looked about at the half dozen tense henchmen in American uniform.

"You appear so certain of our identity, Herr Koenig, I presume it would be a waste of breath to dispute your words," Elton rejoined quietly. "I needn't explain, of course, that I'm quite surprised, eh?"

"You really have no occasion for surprise," Koenig bit out. "Surely you didn't think you were dealing with fools? The fact is I recognized you the morning of your arrival—despite your excellent disguise."

"You agree, then, Herr Koenig, that no disguise is the best disguise?"

"By all means. But my eyes were trained enough, and my memory active enough, to recognize the fresh scar on your lieutenant's neck, and trace its origin in Paris. Likewise, I have many ears hereabouts, and your lieutenant has a dangerous habit of addressing you by your rank, no matter how well you may have coached him."

Elton shrugged, as if his betrayal was a matter of little concern.

"These chances we are forced to take at times, Herr Koenig. But at least you must confess you did not fool us in Paris?"

"Fortunately so, Captain Elton. Otherwise I would not have you now so beautifully at my disposal. Would you like to hear my plans for your future—or do you prefer that I merely put them into effect?"

"I'm sure it would be very gracious of you, Herr Koenig, to entertain me with your version of what is about to happen."

Elton helped himself to a seat on an empty ammunition case, crossed his legs and smiled. The display stung Koenig into a burst of temper.

"*Verdammte* impudence!" he snapped. "Back on your feet, sir! I do not permit a prisoner such liberties in my presence!"

Elton rose with contained deliberation, glancing covertly at his wrist watch as he did so.

"I'm sorry if I trespassed upon your hospitality," he said quietly. "I hope that will not interfere with the pleasure it must afford you to advise me, in the presence of your men, what you plan doing next."

"Glad to oblige," Koenig said, badhumoredly. "Nor will it require many words. I'm sending you through that wall into Germany in a moment—to face charges of killing a German soldier while on German soil as a spy last night. You understand the consequences of such a charge."

"Perfectly," said Elton, retaining both poise and temper. "But I have some plans of my own, Herr Koenig, if you will not be too impatient."

"You mean by that, what?"

Elton was opening his mouth to reply when there was the vibrant rasp of a signal buzzer in the dugout. Koenig half started, the others glanced about apprehensively. Elton's face remained expressionless as the door of the dugout was swung open an instant later.

"Attention! Inspecting officer!" the voice of a soldier rang out from above.

A middle-aged major stalked down into the dugout. Elton could read the play of Koenig's mind at this intervention. It meant merely another prisoner, even if a dangerous one to account for at headquarters. But behind the major came a group of riflemen, filing grimly into the cavern, two full squads of them. Moreover their muskets were held at the alert, ready for emergency. Elton stepped quickly back and indicated Koenig and his henchmen with a toss of his hand.

"Take the whole lot of them, Major," he ordered. "Lieutenant Koenig has just been entertaining me with evidence enough to convict every man here of espionage."

CHAPTER VII

A MESSAGE FOR SPA

KOENIG'S searching eyes made a quick appraisal that told him the hopelessness of resistance. He pulled himself together promptly and turned to the Major with a show of outraged dignity.

"I have been somewhat indiscreet perhaps, sir, with a little prank on a prowling rear-area D.C.I.," he said stoutly. "But I'm afraid the major is being imposed upon with some serious misinformation. I demand the privilege of explaining the situation before this indignity is heaped upon me and members of my platoon!"

The major ignored Koenig and directed his men to disarm all prisoners immediately. Elton stripped Koenig's service automatic from its leather holster and examined it with a critical interest.

"Have arrangements been made, Major, to take over quickly the whole L Company sector?" Elton inquired.

"Yes, and in a big way, Captain," the field officer rejoined. "All I have to do is send back a runner with a message to the first communicating trench. A dozen groups will swarm over the outpost in no time and take everything from the company commander on down."

He scribbled a message and handed it to a sergeant who sprang out of the dugout with eager alacrity.

"That tip you gave G-2 put things in motion," the major added. "When we got Captain Millard's original fingerprints here from Central Records, we found the Millard here an imposter. Must have murdered the original Millard somewhere on the way overseas as they both came over on the same transport as casual officers. It surely was a neat masquerade. We've been itching to close in on this hole as soon as we could get word from you."

Koenig stepped forward a pace from among his men, his face a fine display of stunned amazement.

"I do not understand, gentlemen," he said. "Is it charged that my company commander is an—an imposter? Has some unfortunate coincidence, the details of which I know nothing, brought this embarrassment upon me and my men? Am I to have no opportunity to be heard?"

"My own theory, Koenig," Elton said coolly, "is that the German agent, Millard, was a mere dummy of yours."

"I resent that imputation!" Koenig retorted hotly. "If you must know the truth, I recognized you as a breezy M.P. who annoyed me in Paris. I was going to teach you a lesson by playing a joke on you for your effrontery." He turned to the major. "Surely, sir, you don't believe I—"

"I'd rather you saved your little jokes

for the court-martial," Elton interrupted. "I know they'll be greatly amused by your little prank of tossing a live grenade into my dugout after you failed to trap me out in No Man's Land."

"Infamous!" Koenig protested. "You dare say I threw a grenade?"

"No matter whether you threw it or merely had it thrown," Elton said with a serene smile. "It was really quite a favor, Koenig. A grenade explosion was the pre-arranged signal for the major to come forward with his men from their hiding place in the next trench back. So you made it unnecessary for me to set off that signal, which might have been awkward. All the major had to do was trace me to your dugout by some cigarette trimmings I scattered in my trail. Primitive stuff, eh? I hope you didn't think I was simple enough, Herr Koenig, to put my neck in your little trap without covering my line of retreat?"

"You'll apologize to me for this outrageous slander!" Koenig threatened. "Every man here will testify there was nothing wrong except hazing a Paris embusque who was sticking his nose into front line business!"

Elton smiled laconically and turned to an inspection of the dugout. The hole was about twelve feet square and timbered in heavy cedar posts. That one of these posts screened a subterranean passageway leading to the German lines had been made plain enough by Koenig's brash boasting. But with this Elton was not immediately concerned. Later events would develop all that and in the meantime he had other preparations to make.

He set on end for use as a desk the empty ammunition case that had been denied him a few minutes before by Koenig's arrogance. Then from the hasp of his heavy pocket-knife he extracted a fine ball pen, a container of ink and a small sheet of onion-skin paper. First scrawling a message on a sheet of paper from his notebook, he reduced it painstakingly into the von Straef cipher, transferred it in tiny symbols to the thin paper, attached the signature M-16 and sealed it into a pellet of molten wax from a candle that illumined the dugout.

Half an hour passed. The major's runner returned breathlessly, interrupting Koenig's efforts to force his plea of innocence upon the major's credence.

"All clear outside, sir," the sergeant reported. "Company D has taken over this position. Old L Company's marching back under guard of M.P.'s. Cap'n Millard and the whole outfit in arrest, sir."

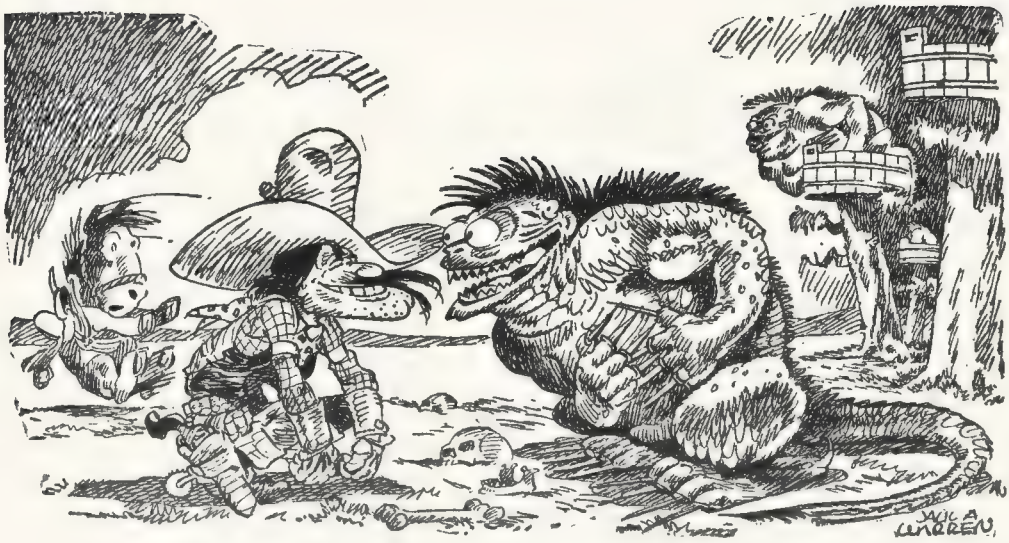
"Good!" said the major, and gave terse orders to his two squads. "Keep every prisoner covered and shoot any man who tries to break ranks! Move out!"

Koenig, hanging back from the rear of the guarded cavalcade as it shuffled up out of the dugout, made a final desperate play at bluffing his way clear of close arrest.

"Until there are formal charges against me," he protested, "I have a right to be treated as an officer—and not herded with enlisted prisoners at the point of a bayonet. I am willing to bring up the rear with you, major, and this captain from Paris."

Elton looked up at Koenig from his work at the ammunition case.

"I'd be only too glad to escort you in, Koenig," he said with a whimsical smile. "But I'm staying here for some little time—at least until one of your German couriers shows up out of the hole behind these timbers. I've neglected to tell you that I found the cipher message in your pistol the other night in Paris. It was altogether too accurate. So I'm working up a little substitute von Straef cipher to send over in your pistol to throw mud in the eyes of your illustrious Imperial staff. And under such circumstances, I think the major ought to march you back under double guard, don't you think, Koenig?"



PECOS BILL GOES HUNTING

By TEX O'REILLY

WISE MEN have written learned books about the dangers of suppressed desires. On our journey through the Arizona desert Tompkins and I had discovered a living example in our guide, old Veracity Updike.

By profession old Veracity was a hermit. A hermit is a man who lives alone and has nobody to talk to. When he does get an audience he makes up for lost time, and usually outtalks the north wind. Just another case of suppressed desires boiling out in an otherwise harmless man.

For two days we had been housed up in a one room adobe cabin, prisoners of a dust storm. For those two days old Veracity had bombarded our ears with a barrage of suppressed conversation. As we crawled out of our blankets on the third morning, looked out the door and found the wind still howling, the silent man of the desert took up his conversation where he had dropped it the night before.

"We were talking about that old hound of Pecos Bill's, weren't we?" he began as he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and put the coffee pot on the fire.

"Yes, you were," replied Tompkins with a great sigh of resignation.

"That was the best dog old Pecos Bill ever had," Veracity rambled as he started the breakfast chores. "Old Bill, I guess, was the fastest runnin' human that the West ever saw. I told you how he used to run the deer down, catch them by the tails and pop their heads off, just like you'd pop a whip. Well, antelopes can run twice as fast as deer. Bill used to run them down too, but it wasn't long before the antelope learned to run faster. They ran faster simply because they had to. Then that old hound came in handy.

"That hound could just naturally outrun anything on four legs. He had a system all his own. He'd run outside the antelope so they'd have to keep turnin' to the left all the time. In that way he'd get them turnin' in a circle.

"Pecos Bill would sight a bunch of antelope, turn that old hound loose, and

go back to camp. Maybe two or three days later, they'd come circlin' round and round with the hound on the outside, until finally they'd be turnin' on a patch of ground no bigger than a blanket. Then they'd get their legs crossed and fall down. After that it was easy to make venison out of them.

"Sounds logical," I chipped in, just to be agreeable.

"It *is* logical," growled old Veracity, glaring at me. "Don't suppose I'd tell you a lie, do you."

"Oh, no. No indeed," I hastily agreed. Veracity is not a man to be crossed when he's on a verbal debauch.

"Well, it was just too bad what happened to that hound," the old guide continued, mollified by my politeness. "One day that old dog was roundin' up a bunch of antelope, and they was unusually fast. They were sailin' along, hundred feet at a jump, faster than a streak of lightin'. The hound was comin' right along catchin' up at every jump.

"The antelope came to a fence, and, as antelopes do, they jumped over. The old hound didn't see it and hit a fence post. When Pecos Bill arrived on the scene, there laid his pet dog, split clean in two.

"That nearly broke old Bill's heart. He took the two halves of the dog, stuck them together, tied a bandage around him and brought him home. He didn't have much hopes that the poor put would live, but day after day that dog kept right on livin'.

"Finally Bill took the bandages off him, and then he saw what a terrible mistake he'd made. In his haste, careless like, he'd put that hound together wrong. Two legs pointed downward like they ought to, and two legs pointed straight up. It was too bad.

"Big old tender-hearted Bill was near heart-broke, but it didn't turn out so bad after all. That hound learned to reverse himself. He'd run awhile on two legs until he got tired, then he'd turn a somerset, and run on the other two legs. He got so he could outrun any animal west of the Pecos, on account of half of him bein' restin' all the time. However, he was a peculiar lookin' dog.

"Bill loved that old hound, but Catastrophe Carrie, his wife, didn't. You see, he'd come in to take a little snooze for himself by the fire, and while he'd have two of his legs curled under him, the other legs would be running frantically in his sleep. She claimed he was just a nuisance around the house.

"It was a pity how Bill finally lost that old hound. You understand that he had a mighty fine sense of smell. Set him on a trail and he'd never quit until he brought home the meat. One day Bill struck the trail of a lynk. He whistled to his old reversible hound and set him on the trail.

"That old canine lit out on that trail, followin' his nose, runnin' like a streak of scared lightin', turnin' over from top legs to bottom legs, until he ran square into a dilemma. You see, this wasn't one lynk he was followin'; it was two lynx. Finally they separated, one turnin' to the right, one to the left.

"That old hound, with his keen sense of smell, one half of which was upside down, hit that place where the two lynx separated and naturally one-half of his nose followed one trail, and the other half followed the other, until he split himself in half. It was a cold winter that year and before Bill found him he was froze to death."

"How true. How true to life," murmured Tompkins, but Veracity ignored him.

"Old Pecos Bill was a man slayer but he was always kind to animals," Veracity wandered on, pausing a moment to draw breath. "On this ranch he staked off, and proved up on, he raised all kinds of animals. One of his pets was a cow with a mother urge.

"Catastrophe Carrie tried to break that cow of her mother urge in every way

she could think of. She soaked her in the Rio Grande, built a fire under her, and put red pepper in her nose; but still that cow would mother everything on the ranch.

"She tried to hatch out a bunch of eggs one time, but she didn't have much luck. Nothing seemed to discourage that fool cow. She'd adopt anything. Once she adopted a family of kittens and sprained her back tryin' to climb a tree after one of them that was treed by a dog.

"Catastrophe worked overtime tryin' to break that cow but she didn't get very far with it. Offspring was what she pined for, and offspring she had to have. Finally she adopted a herd of young ducks. She followed them into a lake one day, clear distracted because she couldn't make them go on four legs.

"Of course it's a fool idea for a cow to try and swim like a duck, but that cow tried. She was an active cow, but she failed. In fact, she drowned. That lake is in New Mexico today. Its name is Wish-a-Wush, which translated into our language means, 'Cow-full-of-Water.'

"Catastrophe Carrie was a mighty hunter herself, but there was one animal that had her scared. That was the chuckle lion. You don't see any of them nowadays, because Pecos Bill exterminated them. He was the only man livin' that could slay them.

"These chuckle lions were terrible varmints. They were nearly as big as a moose, and lived in the tops of the Arizona bucket trees. They had fangs like a pitch fork and claws like a bunch of bowie knives. That made them dangerous enough, but they also had a venomous stinger at the end of their tail. As if all that wasn't enough, their breath was poison.

"The chuckle lion used to hide in his lair in one of the buckets of his favorite bucket tree, and await his quarry. When the unfortunate pioneer would come ridin' along, going to or coming back from somewhere, the lion would watch him with his periscope eye until within striking distance. Then he would make one leap and light all straddled out on the doomed pioneer. Very few escaped.

"There was only one way of killing the chuckle lion, and old Pecos Bill discovered it. You see, the lion had a keen sense of humor, hence its name. For one moment before making his awful leap the lion would teeter up and down on the edge of his bucket, glaring at his victim.

"If you could catch the eye of the chuckle lion at that instant and grin at it, why, the lion would pause and grin back. If you were a good grinner, and kept right on grinning with all your might, the old lion would begin to chuckle and grin wider and wider. Finally his grin would spread clear around until it met on the back of his neck, and the lion would grin the top of his head right off.

"It was a terrible risky hunting, and very few sportsmen had the nerve for it. Bill was adept. He had the most nerve and widest mouth west of the Pecos.

"There was one time though, that his own skill in this form of hunting almost destroyed him. One dark night Catastrophe Carrie stepped out of their tepee to shoot a hellydid that was uprootin' the trees on the side of the mountain. In a minute she came flyin' back wall-eyed with fright.

"'Quick, Bill! A chuckle lion!' she yelled.

"Pecos Bill walked out into the night, ticklin' himself in the ribs to start his grin. Sure enough, there in the gloom of the forest was a chuckle lion glarin' at him. Bill dropped to his hands and knees and began to grin his damnedest. He thought he could see that lion teeterin' up and down, and when his eyes got used to the dark he was sure that old varmint was grinnin'.

"Bill settled down to his job and grinned with every mite of strength in

his face. It was the toughest lion he'd ever tackled. He didn't dare quit, but hour after hour kept right on grinnin'. Finally the dawnin' sun lit up the country, and old Bill saw what he'd been up against.

"For five solid hours he'd been grinnin' at a knot on a big tree, that looked like a chuckle lion in the dark. Even Pecos Bill couldn't grin down a tree, although he did grin off a few branches. The dangerous part of it was he nearly grinned his own head off. To the day of his death his ears never did come down to their normal position. It was a narrow escape."

"I'M VERY GLAD indeed that the chuckle lions are exterminated," I interjected. "But pardon me. What is a hellydid?"

"Don't you know what a hellydid is?" Veracity snorted in disgust at my ignorance. "Well, I'll tell you.

"A hellydid is a four-footed ruminatin' animal somethin' like a blue moose. It has a strange peculiarity. Its legs on one side are shorter than on the other. This comes from the fact that the hellydid lives on circular mountains and always grazes around in the same direction. It stands to reason that its legs on the down-hill side has to be longer than its legs on the up-hill side.

"It's a rare animal these days on account of its bein' so easy to hunt. All you have to do is head it off, turn it around and start it in the opposite direction. It naturally rolls down-hill. Haven't seen one for a couple of years.

"Makes me right sad to see how all the old familiar animals have vanished."

"Did this heroic couple leave any offspring to carry on the Homeric family traditions?" queried Tompkins.

"Yes. An," Veracity responded gloomily.

"Oh, Anne. A girl, was it?" I asked.

"No. *An* offspring, a boy," the old guide growled, wiping a tear from his eye. "It always makes me sorrowful when I think of that time. Things are so different these days.

"It was after Pecos Bill and Catastrophe Carrie had been livin' together about a year in their love nest, that Carrie grabs him by the back of the neck, pulls his head over and whispered her little secret in his ear. Bill was right pleased, arguin' that an offspring would be a great help with the chores.

"The night that the second generation arrived was a terrible night in New Mexico. Bill had been so rough on the Indians, killin' off so many of their best warriors, that they held a big council and organized the Scalpers League. All the tribes went on the war path and swooped down on Bill's ranch to match a fight. They were thousands of them, all uttering wild war whoops and brandishin' their weapons.

"Old Bill, with his good wife Catastrophe by his side, gave battle. All afternoon the terrible war raged. Them Indians circled around the ranch shootin' bullets like hail. The sun was darkened by the clouds of arrows, and the din was hideous. Bill and Carrie stood back to back, never givin' an inch. The rattle of their trusty six-shooters sounded like a regiment of trap drummers, and with every shot a dozen redskins bit the dust.

"Along about midnight when the fight was at its worst, Carrie spoke up, and says:

" 'Bill, dear husband, ain't it just like them red devils to pick tonight for their party? I'll have to quit you for awhile, because the little stranger is about to increase our family.'

"So saying Carrie beat it for the house. There never was such an awful battle. The thunder rolled and the lightnin' flashed, and an earthquake set the rocks to grindin' and the ground to rollin' in waves. A volcano started to spout fire in the mountains, lightin' up the fear-

some scene. Bill fought on against them thousands of savages.

"It was with the uproar of battle ringin' in her ears that Catastrophe Carrie faced her hour. The little baby came into this world squallin' like a panther. Pausing to empty a quart of liquor he grabbed a hatchet and ran out of the door.

" 'Give 'em hell, paw, I'm comin',' he yells. Old Bill's heart swelled with pride as he realized that he was a fond father.

"When Bill and the kid came in about sun-up, after killin' the last tribe of Indians, Carrie had the house tidied up and breakfast on the fire. It was a touchin' scene as the happy trio sat down to feed their faces. That afternoon Bill and Carrie baptized the youngster in a boilin' spring and named him Pecos Bull."

"What a remarkable family," interrupted Tompkins. "Pecos Bill is no longer living, is he?"

"No, and it's a mercy he passed on before the tourists ruined this country," with his head bowed in his hands, old Veracity seemed almost overcome by his emotions. "It was his drinkin' habits ruined him. He used to put strychnine and wolf poison in his whiskey to give it a bite, and when that lost its tang he put fish hooks and barbed wire in his drink. That's what killed him. It rusted out his interior."

"And what became of that noble pioneer wife, Catastrophe Carrie," questioned Tompkins.

"It's a terrible thing to admit, but she's in Hollywood runnin' a tea room."

Veracity frankly surrendered to his emotions, and his sobs shook his shoulders.

"And the lusty offspring, Pecos Bull," I asked.

"That's the worst of all," the old guide looked tragic. "Strangers, I hate to admit it, but I'm him. I am the one and only bono fido son of Pecos Bill and Catastrophe Carrie. It makes me ashamed to think how I've degenerated. It comes from mixin' up with fool dudes and modern society.

"Folks call me Veracity because I'm a perfect fanatic about always tellin' the truth, but Pecos Bull was my maiden name. I never was the man my paw was, nor my maw either."

At that moment the door of the shack banged open and young Jody, our horse wrangler, put his head in to shout:

"Wind's done died down. The dust storm's over. Roll out and let's get started."

Gratefully we saddled our horses, delighted at the prospects of escape from the dust storm, and the monologue of our word-worshiping guide.

"Fine day," declared Tompkins as we turned into the trail.

"Shut up," growled Veracity. "I hate a man who talks too much."

Silently we rode into the sunset.

THE SEA PLUNDERERS

By BERRY FLEMING

SECOND OF TWO PARTS

SYNOPSIS OF PART I

IT WAS NOT the crew of the pirate ship *Esperanza* who mutinied, but the captain and the mate. They were a crafty and sinister pair, were Captain Quinn and Nicholas Waine, and Captain Quinn sometimes had an uneasy feeling that Nicholas was just a little too crafty, a shade too sinister. Captain Quinn was right. What happened was this:

The *Esperanza* having in her hold an odd number of chests filled with plate and specie, jewelry and gems, and a British man-of-war having appeared on the horizon, Captain Quinn proposed to the crew that they sail for the coast of the Carolinas and there run up some small river and refit. But when they had got to place where Old Topsail Inlet is joined by Skull Creek there was no refitting done. Captain Quinn and Nicholas Waine shot all of the crew dead—all but the one they most feared—the one called Dirque—who escaped into the marshland after vainly trying to blow the ship to bits.

In this fight Captain Quinn was wounded and did not recover consciousness for several days. When he finally revived he found himself in a pleasant manor house and gradually learned the following astounding and disconcerting facts: that the house was the home of Nicholas Waine's father, who believed that his runaway son had just returned from a highly profitable trading voyage; that the British frigate *Challenger* which

had pursued the *Esperanza* was now in the nearby harbor of Port Royal Sound; that on board the *Challenger* was a young officer named Winton who had once had a hand to hand fight with Nicholas and would recognize him as a pirate; that indeed the officer had called at the house, but luckily when Nicholas was away on some private business of his own.

What Captain Quinn did not learn was that the bullet which laid him low and which he supposed had been fired by the pirate Dirque had really been fired at Nicholas' orders by Nicholas' negro servant Daniel. Nicholas wanted Captain Quinn out of the way for a few days while he attended to this same private business. And what that was we now learn.

PART II

NICHOLAS had spent less than one whole night under his father's roof. Five hours after he had folded his hands to mention that his Captain Quinn had a bullet-hole in his back, he closed the front door of *Wythewood* softly behind him and hastened off through the sharp, thin air that precedes the breaking of day. A dog ran shivering up to him as he entered the tunnel through the live oaks leading to the high-road. Nicholas stopped and patted him on the head.

"Stay here," said Nicholas. "You mustn't follow me. Dog, let no one make a wanderer of you." He leaned over and lifted one of the dog's pendulent ears: "The strain of returning to altered faces is hard on the heart."

He patted him again, then waved him back to the house.

Nicholas left the road after about a mile and walked west along a narrow path through the forest. When he entered the trees he lighted his lantern; he was confident that he would meet no one now.

After half an hour the still branches began to take shape against the early sky and he smelled the salt that floated in from the marshes. Suddenly the woods ended and before him lay the colorless ribbon of the Inlet and the little patch of wet sand on which he had landed the night before. In the grass, with its prow against the sand, was the black form of the *Esperanza's* boat; Daniel sat in the bottom asleep, his head resting on one of the thwarts.

"Daniel," said Nicholas.

The negro was awake in an instant.

"Maussah."

Daniel pushed off at once and began the long pull up the Inlet back to the brig.

"Maussah's breakfas' dah in little bucket," said Daniel.

"Phenomenal man!" said Nicholas, and Daniel laughed in pleasure.

Nicholas unwrapped the napkin in which his breakfast had been folded and ate the cold beef and bread.

"I should value you, Daniel," said Nicholas, as the sun began to break through the gray clouds that ran like mountains along the horizon, "I should value you at approximately seven bags of Spanish silver."

"Seb'n, maussah?"

"Aye," said Nicholas; "seven bags. Seven bags and a quarter, we'll call it."

He took a cigar out of an inside pocket, lighted it, and turned round on the seat until his back was toward Daniel and he faced the sun. At even intervals came the steady, powerful thrust of Daniel's oars, and at even intervals the swirling circles in the water glided by the stern.

They had got about half-way to the brig when Daniel said, resting for a moment on his oars:

"Dah's ol' Hans, maussah."

Nicholas started and looked half around.

A black object just broke the surface of the water as it floated by within twenty yards.

"Ol' debil!" said Daniel, and spat in the direction of it.

"It may be Dirque," said Nicholas.

"Yellow hair, maussah," said Daniel. "Ol' Hans."

They passed it very slowly, for the tide was following and bringing it after them. Nicholas watched it as the slight wash from the boat rolled completely over it. After a time it became but a dot and they left it behind a bend.

They had changed their direction several times, keeping as close to the marsh that bordered the Island as they could. But the marsh itself swept in and out in great majestic curves, making it sometimes necessary to go a quarter of a mile round a grassy promontory to get two hundred yards nearer the brig. Their average course, though, had changed about forty-five degrees; when the sun rose, it was directly off the stern, but in an hour it was well on Nicholas's right. They were now on the opposite side of the low hills from *Wythewood*. Nicholas watched the form of them evolve. The crests were distinct enough for him to see the tall palm trees, scattered along the summit, with their thin, naked trunks and large tops, like round-headed pins.

"How far are the palm trees?" said Nicholas.

"'Bout t'ree mile, maussah," said Daniel, as though he had already figured it out.

Nicholas watched them, absorbed, until Daniel said, "Near 'bout home, maussah."

He looked over his shoulder and there, rising up over the brown grass of the marsh, were the masts and spars of the *Esperanza*, leaning a few points to starboard as they had been when he left them on the afternoon before.

THEY rounded the point and Nicholas turned about on his seat to watch her. There was something peculiarly mournful in her. Had she been aground on an ocean beach the waves would have charged and pounded her and there would have been some tangible danger and some explicable fear; but she lay there in a level pond in the midst of vast, soundless meadows, and the only things in sight that moved were the gulls circling in disorder about the masts. On an open beach with the waves roaring over her bulwarks, she might have seemed to be dying; now she seemed dead, and the whole Inlet seemed hushed in awe.

When they came into the shade cast by the hull, the water was so still that they could see the sandy bottom on which she rested. Nicholas's eye caught a grotesque glinting that must have been the barrel of some man's pistol.

When the tide turned in the afternoon, Nicholas stood in the small boat and held it to the side while Daniel, with the senseless captain hanging lifeless over his shoulder, descended the ladder. Quinn was laid in the bottom and covered with a tarpaulin.

Nicholas climbed the ladder and leaned over the bow of the *Esperanza*, watching Daniel take the captain home; the boat disappeared round the point, the sun lay down in its bed of clouds beyond the trees in the west, and Nicholas was alone.

Daniel had cleaned the brig to a certain extent. The bodies had been removed from the deck and out of the rigging, and the blessed rain that had fallen on the night of Nicholas's return home had washed the vessel. On the poop and in the waist large stains still remained, but the downpour had dimmed them and they no longer suggested what they were.

The deck was still in disorder. Ropes and gear lay about in confusion, and here and there a white gash showed in the wood where a ball had ripped it open; loose sheets dangled from the yards, torn asunder by the bullets, their frazzled ends hanging about like unkempt hair.

He leaned in meditation over the star-

board bulwarks watching the wide, far-reaching marsh on the southern shore grow blurred as the night enveloped it. The trees on the land disappeared, the grass became a solid shadow; there was, on the edge of the water just above high tide, a small band of oyster shells. This gleamed longest, and even when he turned away to the cabin was still discernible.

It was three o'clock in the morning before he slept; it took him nine hours to redistribute the treasure.

It was Nicholas's plan to remove from the chests all the specie that could be used at once; the plate, the silver bars, the stones and jewelry he would hide and unearth on some later voyage, when he would be going to some place where they could be disposed of. In this colonial port it would be suicide to try to convert any of it into gold; besides, he did not need it. There was specie enough to provide against almost any need.

He pried open the trap-door in the floor of the cabin and, after a good deal of exertion, got the three ponderous chests out of the closet and ranged in a semicircle about the lantern. He turned their contents out on the floor and surveyed the glittering heaps in wonder. He had not realized that it amounted to so much.

He removed all the silver and gold money and paper certificates, piled it on the table, and sorted the rest. The heavier plate and bars he distributed over the bottoms of the chests, then poured the jewelry and stones over it, filling the crevices and forming a thick layer that filled two of the chests to the brim.

The money was then sorted and the English currency separated from the rest. When he counted the English money alone, he found that it amounted to more than fifty thousand pounds sterling.

There was a pair of belts in the cabin which Nicholas had found some years before on the bodies of two Jews who had been killed in some forgotten fight for resisting the sword of fate, as Nicholas had told them, and which he had had Daniel remove, both because of the money in them and because he thought they might be useful things for him to own. Each was made of kid, and divided into small pockets reaching from the buckle on one end to the buckle-holes on the other; each had a pair of straps, meant to be passed over the shoulders of the wearer and thus distribute the weight of the belt when it was loaded. Nicholas had thought of giving one of them to Quinn, but on second thought put it in his box to lend to Daniel if ever there should be need.

He packed each pocket in both belts with as much of the English money as it would contain, using first of all the paper currency, both because it would be light to carry and because, if it were buried, it would soon disintegrate. What was left he put, with the foreign currency, into the third chest. He locked the lids down again, folded the belts back in his box, and went to bed.

NICHOLAS made two trips into the Island. In these his plans miscarried somewhat; he had allowed five days in which to find a suitable spot for leaving the treasure, to get the chests underground and all traces obliterated. He thought he should not be absent from home more than a week. But instead of five days, it required fourteen. He was delayed twice, but both delays were unavoidable, and Nicholas made no complaint.

The first delay was caused simply by a solid day and a half of rain. It began a few hours after Daniel had rowed back up the Inlet from *Wythewood,* and continued its steady whisper down through the rigging all that afternoon and night and up to evening of the next day.

It crept up on them as quietly as smoke and began to fall in a light mist. "We will wait until it clears," said Nicho-

las, looking out through the window in the stern of the cabin at the water, roughened and glinting like the surface of a new file.

The afternoon he spent in making an examination of the brig. He found for provisions:

1½	bbls.	Beef
1	"	Pork
½	"	Flour
2	lbs.	Bread
3	C	Bread
3½	qts.	Rum

The water had been used down to the final barrel, but he felt sure that he could obtain a fresh supply when he went inland. Of the provisions, he had Daniel open the last barrel of beef, it being easier to cook than the pork, and bring a supply for seven days aft to the cabin, preparatory to loading it into the small boat.

The ordnance on board consisted of the four small cannon, still lashed to the deck in their canvas jackets as they had been on the voyage across the ocean, and the following gunner's supplies:

8 bbls. Powder
50 double-headed Shot
6 bunches Gun-matches
500 lbs. Musket-balls for large guns and small
25 Iron shot for Swivel Guns
7 sheets lead for melting into bullets

He put the lists among his private papers. He could not decide whether he should have further need of these supplies or not; if not, it would be wisest to sink them all in the Inlet, for he had no intention of preserving them for someone else to use. He postponed making a decision.

In the middle of the next afternoon the rain ceased. The sun set clear, and as it went down Nicholas finished binding to the taffrail the block through which the ropes were to run in lowering the chests and supplies into the small boat. Nicholas bound it on with skill and meanwhile hummed to himself snatches of *All in a Garden Green*, for the sun was shining again and the rain was over.

The next morning Nicholas stood on the poop and watched the sun rise, breathing in the keen air, salty off the marshes and mingled now and then with an evanescent tinge of the coffee Daniel was preparing in the galley. The small boat lay in the shelter of the stern, swinging idly at her painter on the tide that was just beginning to run. In an hour the skiff would be scraping against the hull; in two, the flowing tide would be carrying her, with Nicholas and Daniel aboard and with her bottom filled with boxes, kegs, and tarpaulins, picks and shovels, over the bars and up the channel of Skull Creek.

It would be necessary for the treasure to be left on board the brig unguarded during the time they were on the Island, but this did not worry Nicholas, for he knew that there were no houses on the near side of the hills. He thought of the bare possibility of the brig's being discovered by Indians, for there had been a few round the coast in the days of his childhood; but no one had mentioned them when he was home, and the news that he had gathered while at sea from travelers who had been in the colonies was that the Indians in the south had drawn away to the uplands and rarely came nearer the sea than a hundred miles, except when, occasionally, a group of their gray canoes appeared on the river for purposes of trade.

Even this did not happen often, for they traded at the white settlements that had been established on the rivers —and even if they came down, they would have no reason to be wandering about among the waste marshes. He discarded the thought that the treasure might not be safe.

DANIEL served Nicholas's breakfast on the cabin table, standing by in silence while Nicholas ate. He knew that Nicholas would not speak. He could remember only one breakfast at which his master had talked, and this was when Nicholas sat down to the table for the first time after lying in bed for weeks with his forehead split open. Nicholas had talked that morning—idle and trivial chatter as if he felt effervescent life being renewed in his veins and was compelled to speak. But this morning he said nothing.

When he had finished he sent Daniel away to the galley to have his own breakfast and examined carefully the supplies piled on the cabin floor to make sure that they would not have to return to the vessel until they were ready to remove the chests.

He hesitated on the subject of arms; it seemed to him a useless encumbrance to carry arms in an uninhabited country.

"Arms for civilization," said he aloud, "where faith is dead and envy is satisfied by treachery." He laughed; he worshiped phrases but he laughed at his worship. He laid a blunderbuss and a brace of pistols by the stack, a powder-horn and a pouch of bullets. "Civilization has spoiled man's eye," he went on, with as much expression as if he had had an audience. "What a comparatively small target even a wild turkey presents to a man accustomed to roving."

When the small boat began to knock against the stern, Daniel was sent down the ladder. He hauled the boat under the cabin window, the ropes were fastened round the gear, the block at the taffrail squeaked with the weight; Nicholas guided the boxes out of the window, and Daniel lowered them to the bottom of the boat. In half an hour Nicholas threw his black cape round his shoulders, cast a final glance about the cabin, and descended the ladder. He guided the boat under the bowsprit while Daniel climbed the ladder and drew it up to the deck; Daniel swung himself down from the bobstays, took up the oars, and pulled into the mouth of the Creek.

They landed two hours later at a clearing on the northern bank, having gone as far up-stream as they could. At the point at which they hauled the boat ashore the Creek was scarcely twenty feet broad, with the tide nearly at the flood.

They found a small, sandy-bottomed spring a few hundred yards from the bank, and to the side of this the supplies were carried. The underbrush was cleared away and the tarpaulins made fast to the lower branches of the trees so as to form two shelters. When they had finished making camp, only an hour of daylight remained.

Nicholas breakfasted the next morning before the sun rose. He waited until it cleared the chain of hills, then put the spy-glass under his arm and beckoned to the negro; he set off toward the northeast, in the general direction of the ridge, Daniel following him with a newly sharpened ax and a small compass.

The sun had climbed to within an hour of the zenith before they had mounted far enough up the southern slope of the hills to enable them to get a panorama of the Island. It stretched out below them now, vast and silent except for the noise of the light wind that was blowing from the southwest where the ocean lay—an undulating country of flat valleys and broad low knolls, covered with a black tangle of brush and small trees. Here and there a lonely pine stood like a watchman. The only outstanding mark on the whole of the dreary expanse was the dark line of the heavy growth that followed the twisting course of Skull Creek.

Nicholas sat down on the sand and, steadying the glass on his raised knees, studied the Island slowly as though with

a microscope. Behind him, Daniel squatted on his heels, peering over his head and along the brass tube, observing with his naked eye what Nicholas was examining through the glass.

Nicholas noticed that the Creek ran off the Inlet in a predominantly straight line to the south; after about a mile, it dropped away in a wide semicircle. Its course was generally like the form of a sickle, with the handle at the Inlet and the point lost in the heavier foliage of the hills. They had made camp near the spot where the blade joined the handle. At about the point on the blade at which a prolongation of the handle would have intersected it, Nicholas perceived now for the first time the presence of a tree of unusual magnitude, rising up out of the brush, sinewy and tall. He let the glass rest on it for several minutes in thought. As nearly as he could judge, it seemed some kind of cypress, though it was not an evergreen.

In a moment he sprang to his feet and closed the telescope.

"I think, Daniel," said he, "we will hide this dead-men's gold in the bed of Skull Creek."

Daniel opened his eyes.

"In de Creek, maussah!"

"'Under land and water' will be the wording," said he.

He took the bearing of the tree with the compass, then set off hurriedly down the slope.

The sun was well into the west when they entered the thick brush that bordered the Creek and arrived at the base of the tree. The water was buried in a heavy tangle of briars and small trees, as if it were something frail and had been packed carefully away from the elements.

Pushing his way into the vines, he found that the current now ran in a thin, clear stream, with a flow greatly diminished from that at the point where they had gone ashore. Here and there the banks were so close together that a man could have stepped from one to the other, and the limbs and tendrils hung so close to the surface as to make the water seem almost to be issuing out of a culvert. With but little labor, he thought, a dam could be built at such a place and the water temporarily diverted into another channel while they opened the bottom of this one to receive the chests. It would not be a year before all signs of its having been disturbed would be obliterated.

TO MARK the spot so that he himself should be able to find it again, ten, fifteen, twenty-five years later, he determined to fix it in relation to the tree; the tree, he thought, could be fixed in relation to some more distant point. With this in mind he slung the telescope over his shoulder by a cord and climbed into the black branches.

He had mounted only half-way up when, looking toward the Inlet, he found, to his great satisfaction, that he could see the foremast of the brig. He climbed no farther, but immediately focused the glass; through it he could see the foretop clearly and the gulls flying about the spars.

He descended at once, content; the tree could be located by compass directions from the brig, and the chests could be buried in the Creek not twenty feet away.

He called Daniel and they hastened off through the gathering night back to their camp.

On the second day ashore the new channel was dug to divert the water round the spot where he intended to make the excavation. The ditch was half finished when they stopped at noon to eat; in the middle of the afternoon the final spade of sod was removed, and they saw the water of the Creek divide and rush down the new course. This lessened the current flowing in the natural channel and made the dam across

the narrowest part easier to build. When the sun reached the tops of the palmetto trees in the west, the dam was completed. The whole of the current now flowed down the ditch; they returned to camp, leaving the bottom of the old channel to dry.

When they arrived the next morning, it was evident that the tide, which had risen to the flood during the night, had pushed back the water of the Creek and overflowed the spot. Another dam was, therefore, built on the lower end to prevent the tide, which would reach its height shortly after noon, from covering the bottom with water again; this delayed them an hour. Except for this, Nicholas would have climbed into the tree at about four o'clock, instead of at about five, which would have changed his history.

As it was, he did not begin to take accurate bearings of the place until well after four. He waited until only Daniel's black head was visible above the ground as he threw up the moist sand; he had told Daniel to make the hole six feet deep, and the negro went on digging until he could not see over the edge except by tiptoeing.

While he was excavating the last foot, Nicholas measured with a sounding-line to the base of the tree; he called the distance three fathoms and a half, and noted it down. He then oriented the compass on the ground at the tree and sighted over it to the top of the negro's head, appearing and disappearing at the edge of the hole. The bearing from the tree was south southeast.

He wrote down SSE and, swinging the telescope over his shoulder again, once more began to climb.

He wished if possible to find some spot on the Island, probably on the slope of the hills, that could be seen from the brig and from which the tree would be visible. The brig in time might be destroyed; he did not intend that the possibility of rediscovering the chests should be destroyed with it. He wanted to locate the tree in reference to some more immutable point. He, therefore, when he reached the fork from which he had observed the brig two days previously, laid the telescope at the hills.

For a time, as he studied them, the slopes seemed to roll monotonously up to level crests, with no distinguishing mark of any kind; then, all at once, a crag on one of the easterly hills seemed to spring to life. It suddenly seemed to hang over a line of white sand like a brow, and a black boulder in the midst of it suddenly gave the spot the appearance of an eye, gazing back at him with a sort of leering wink.

"If ever I saw it, the Devil's Eye!" breathed Nicholas, half aloud.

The bearing from the tree was due east.

He wrote this down with the other data and turned his glass on the foremast of the brig, just visible between the tall bare trunks of two palmettos. He could see the birds flying lazily about the yard-arms as they had been doing when he observed them before.

Then, of a sudden, as he watched them, they swirled into the air.

He braced himself in the fork and sighted again.

Vertically, he could see no lower than the foresailyard on account of small trees intervening. In the space above, the birds were now in a swarm,some flashing swiftly over the peaks of the masts, some winging straight off to the shore.

What had disturbed them?

He felt as if a cold hand had been laid against the base of his skull!

He climbed quickly out of the tree and told Daniel they would return to the brig on the tide that was then ebbing.

BEFORE they reached the last bar in the Creek, twilight had fallen. At the edge of the marsh, Nicholas guided the boat's prow against a bank of oyster-

shells and held it there with an oar for a time, looking about him.

A sharp breeze blew over the marsh and bent the tops of the grass with a quiet hiss like soft rain; except for this there was no sound. The Inlet was still, as if the ebbing tide had hummed it to sleep. The brig, black and silent in the half dark, lay in the middle of the water like the corpse of some sea-monster; the birds had gone and the air about the spars was empty.

Nicholas wondered if he could be mistaken in thinking somebody had gone aboard. No fisherman ever wandered in these waters; nobody knew of the presence of the boat. He put aside the faint possibility that Quinn might have recovered from his wound sufficiently to escape from *Wythewood* and return to the treasure. After all, countless things could have frightened the birds, from a rope suddenly swinging in the wind, to the departed spirits of the twelve men returning to the vessel to wander about for a space until they could select the bird whose form they would assume; their disturbance could be accounted for either realistically or supernaturally, either way, he thought, more plausible than to suppose that a human being could have found the brig and gone aboard.

Nicholas pushed off from the oyster-bank and let the current carry them down, assisting it now and then with a careful dip of the paddle; they floated toward the brig as silently as a shadow. He steered the boat under the bowsprit, then stood up and caught the stays. He listened motionless for perhaps a minute; the same unbroken silence shrouded the vessel and the Inlet. Then he cocked his pistol. He was going aboard.

It had never occurred to him to send Daniel. He would have had to do nothing but suggest it; Daniel would not have hesitated to do anything Nicholas bade him. Nicholas could then have waited in safety until it was evident whether or not the vessel was occupied. Such an idea never entered his head; he motioned Daniel to hold to the bobstays, then swung himself quickly up to the bowsprit.

In the dim light the deck seemed unchanged. He stood in the bow and looked at the vague forms of the gear and cordage strewn over the deck in confusion. Nothing moved.

He waved to Daniel to climb up the stays and join him. When Daniel reached the bow, he gave him a pistol and they walked slowly down the deck to the forecastle hatchway. Nicholas had wanted to go at once to the cabin where he had left the chests; if they were untouched it would mean that his fears were unfounded and that no one had been on board. But it would not have been prudent to leave the deck-house and the forecastle unsearched. He would get this done on the way to the cabin.

"Wait here," said he in Daniel's ear, when they reached the forecastle. He took a knife out of his belt and descended the ladder. Daniel heard him moving round in the dark; then he reappeared and they went to the deck-house. Finding no one in either place, they entered the cabin and struck a light.

There was no sign of anybody's having been there; the chests stood in a semicircle as he had placed them; the bolts on all of them were fast.

They slept through the night, Nicholas in his bunk, Daniel on the floor against the door to the deck; when morning came they rose as if no one was or had been within a thousand miles.

BUT when Daniel went into the galley at dawn he found the remains of a meal. He told Nicholas of it at breakfast; Nicholas walked to the door of the cabin and from there saw what he had been unable to see the night before: one of the boats was missing. He went at once to his box in which he had placed the

belts filled with currency. Only one remained.

Nicholas climbed into the fore-crosstrees and remained there all day watching through the glass for the least movement that might betray the whereabouts of the missing boat. But nothing through his whole range of vision moved except the clouds, and here and there a bird.

The loss of the money did not itself worry Nicholas. If he had dropped the belt irrecoverably into the Inlet he would not have let it concern him much; he would have regarded it as a trifling slip of the wheel of fortune, adjusted himself to the loss, and gone his way. He was not a man who spent much time in regret; what was done, was done, and he buried it. What worried him was that the presence of the brig and the treasure was now known to another besides Quinn and Daniel and himself. He could still probably hide the chests successfully; but there was a fourth man who would carry with him to his death the knowledge that they had been hidden. He did not sigh because this was known, but he thought for a long time of the probable effects on his life of its being known.

Who this fourth man was concerned him, because what the man was likely to do with his knowledge could be foretold only by knowing who he was. If he were a stranger, a wandering fisherman or an Indian, he thought there was not much to fear in consequences. But he had to put this comforting thought aside at once; nobody would have taken the labor of stealing the ship's boat if he had had one already.

It was someone without a boat, someone who had swum to the vessel and climbed aboard by the rope hanging from the stern. He thought it must undoubtedly be one of the crew, and this opened up a vast array of possible dangers. If it were true, if one of them had escaped on the fatal night, he could now be sure that he was dealing with a mortal enemy, an enemy who wished him nothing less than death; this man had now, through possessing the money, become powerful. If he had disappeared, content with acquiring his wealth, Nicholas was gladly rid of him; whether he was content with this or whether he would return for a different sort of revenge, depended on who he was.

But there was no way of being sure. Three of the crew had not been found on board the next morning; Nicholas had thought they had been shot near the bulwarks and fallen into the Inlet, but he realized now that they might have leaped of their own will. The unknown might be any one of the three. Dirque's body had never been found; it might be Dirque.

Whoever it was, the man had probably been watching the brig from the shore, and being driven on by his hunger, had taken a chance that she was as unoccupied as she seemed and swum out to her. It was possible that he had seen Daniel row Nicholas up the Inlet and return alone, and, with some imagination, he might have guessed that there was a settlement not far away.

Nicholas felt certain that the man was alone, for the simple reason that only a small amount of food was missing from the galley. Two men would have taken more. As to why he had not carried off both of the belts, Nicholas thought it was a matter of convenience. He could have worn but one. But he probably intended to come back before long for the other. He had disappeared, but Nicholas knew he had not gone off into obscurity to remain and leave him in possession of unqualified victory.

Nicholas recalled one idle evening when he had smoked in the seat under the stern windows of the cabin, and counted up, with the aid of Daniel's memory, the number of times his life had been in peril from his fellow man—counting, not the peril of storms and the dangers of the three shipwrecks he

had lived through, but only the times when, but for some fortunate accident or but for his own quickness of perception, he would have died by some human agency; it seemed to him that there were enough to average about two a month for the past ten years.

He had become in a sense used to it. Open danger stirred his heart, quickened his mind, drew his nerves into the tautest sensibility, making them decide actions for themselves, making him press a trigger before his brain knew that a shot might save him. Open danger intoxicated him, put a flash in his eyes; he could face danger in the actual night because he had a confidence in himself that assured him the darkness was less perilous to him than to his adversary.

But the danger that hung insensibly in the air, the danger that could not be perceived, that required incessant alertness, with the possibility that the alertness might show him that no danger existed, the danger that seemed to place him in the light and his enemy in obscurity—this sort of danger wore him down. And this was the sort that now confronted him. He did not know how he was to be attacked, or if he was to be attacked at all; he did not know who his enemy was or what were his weapons. He was convinced only of this: that an enemy existed and that he would probably not postpone attacking very long.

He remained on board the brig for a whole day, searching the marshes and the streams through the telescope for some sign of the man or his boat. When the sun set he searched more insistently than ever for the smoke of a fire. But the marshes stretched away to the trees and the trees to the hills as if their peace had never been broken by the presence of man. . . . Nicholas decided to go on with his work and get the chests under ground as quickly as possible; that done, he would again return home, keeping his senses alert for any traces of a strange seaman with an unusual propensity for spending money.

The next morning he seemed to have put the matter entirely out of his head; he raised the ends of the chests while Daniel passed a rope about them to form the handle for hoisting them, and, when this was done, he guided them through the cabin window as Daniel pulled on the rope from the small boat moored under the stern, all as if nothing whatever had disturbed the running of his plans.

When the haze which hung over the water at daybreak began to be dissipated, Nicholas took his telescope and once more climbed the shrouds to the foretop. It was his purpose to ascertain the visibility of the hill with the crag and line of sand, and to note its bearing from the mast. He was inexpressibly relieved to find that the spot could be seen clearly through the glass, and that from here just as unmistakably as from the tree it suggested the form of an eye. The direction was east southeast.

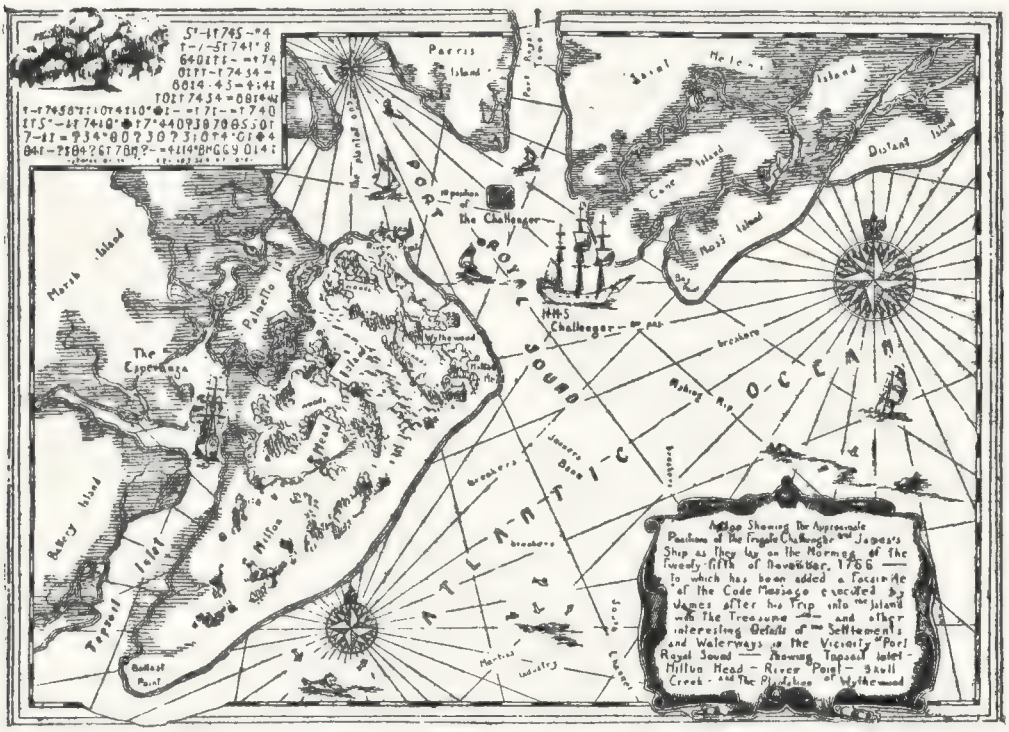
He now possessed, he thought, all the information he needed to enable him to rediscover the treasure, no matter how many years should pass to befog his memory.

When the tide turned, they entered the boat and rowed on the current with the three chests back into the Creek, the water running close to the gunwales with the increased weight. Nicholas sat in the stern with the blunderbuss across his knees and peered into the gray maze of the heavy, round shafts of the marsh-grass, rising out of the fine mud and bordering the Creek like a wall. On a point of the marsh was the low bank of blanched oyster-shells, where they had waited for a moment the evening before. Behind this, Nicholas now noticed that the tall grass was crushed and broken as if some one had forced his way through it.

"Ol' Dirque, maussah," said Daniel. "Sho' as gun's i'on."

Nicholas expressed no opinion; he waved for Daniel to go on, and they returned to the camp.

Three nights later Nicholas leaned intently over the cabin table, pen and ink before him. A lantern burned at his left elbow; at his right stood a round-bellied bottle and a wine-glass, half empty. Through the stern windows at his back


Parris Island
Coast Line
Island
Distant Island
Coast Island
Mast Island
Bay
Position of the Challenger
H.M.S. Challenger
Breakers
Fishing Bay
Morris Island
Palmetto Island
The Cypress
Wythewood
Mead Island
Rebecca Island
Topsail Inlet
Milton
Bulkhead Point
Marshes
Industry
Creek
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Anchor Shewing the Approximate Positions of the Frigate Challenger and Jansen's Ship as They lay on the Morning of the Twenty-fifth of November, 1766 — to which has been added a Facsimile of the Code Message executed by James after his Trip into the Island with the Treasure — and other interesting Details of the Settlements and Waterways in the Vicinity of Port Royal Sound — Showing Topsail Inlet - Million Head - River Point - Bavill Creek - and The Plantation of Wythewood

he could hear the never-resting tides slushing along the hull and round the rudder-post. In three more hours day would be breaking. Now and then he lifted his head in thought, shading his eyes from the light with his hand. He was drawing up the directions for finding the treasure.

The chests had been buried, the Creek turned back into its natural channel, the tree marked so that it could be discovered from the crag. The marker was nothing less than a crucifix of gold, measuring about twelve inches from top to bottom, and studded with precious stones. This he had fastened securely in a fork of the tree, high above the ground, placing it vertically and in such a way that in time the tree would grow about the lower end of it.

It was completely hidden from below and from the north and the south by the large prongs of the fork; it was hidden from the west by a group of minor limbs. The branches that grew on the east and interposed between it and a direct view from the rock were hewn away, leaving it visible from the rock and the rock alone.

He knew from mathematics that the crucifix was large enough to be seen with a telescope from a distance no greater than that to the hill.

This done, Nicholas had taken a farewell glance round the spot, drunk a swallow of the water from the Creek in benediction, and gone back to the brig.

His watch had passed midnight an hour before he had constructed a cipher that suited him. The directions would have to be in code, but he did not want to use a code whose key he could not readily carry in his head. The ciphers

which suggested themselves to him at first were either so complicated as to make their keys almost impossible to remember, or so simple as scarcely to be ciphers at all.

But he finally evolved one which satisfied him. He knew that there was no danger of his ever losing the key; the numerals, from zero to nine, represented the first ten letters of the alphabet, and, by knowing even these ten, he thought he could decipher the directions. In addition to these, however, he knew that he could use the five further letters, N, O. V, M, R, from the cipher of the month, in the date line, for if ever he forgot that he had come here in November he thought he would have forgotten that he had ever had a treasure to bury. In addition to these, he possessed a sixteenth letter, S, from the signature, James.

The letters, then, that he possessed, and would possess as long as he possessed a mind, were:

A	0
B	1
C	2
D	3
E	4
F	5
G	6
H	7
I	8
J	9
N	?
O	-
V	=
M	†
R	″
S	‡

He was sure that the directions could never escape him.

The characters, which he scratched into the leather and inked, ran in a line of four sections round the inside of the money-belt. The date and his pseudonym he carved at the end, with space between.

5″-‡†745-″4†-/-5†741″8640‡††-=†740‡† †-†7484=80‡4.4
8=4;4‡†o‡†7484=80‡44‡†-†7458″‡††o †o†4‡††o″*
‡-=†7‡-=†740‡†5″-††740†o″*‡7″ 440?30700550†7-†‡
=?34″0o?30?3;o†4″o‡*404†-?‡04?6†7
BH?—=4†14″BHGG 90†4‡

When he had finished, he hooded the lantern and leaned back in the shadow. He lowered his chin and looked out into the cabin from beneath his brows.

"'*From the foretop of the brig east southeast to the Devil's Eye'!*" He laughed to himself, relishing the rhythm. "'*Due west as the devil sees to the first mate's mark! Under land and water a skeleton's length'!*" He laughed again. "I doubt if Kidd himself could have phrased it better."

After a time the expression of his eyes seemed to change. He gazed long at the money-belt, then pushed it away from him across the table. He leaned his head on his hands.

He did not move again until the chilly air of dawn crept about his ankles and aroused him. Twenty hours later he sent Daniel up the tree at *Wythewood* to brush the outer twigs against the window of the guest-chamber.

THE next day the frigate appeared on the horizon again. She came into view about noon, scarcely half an hour after Nicholas and Quinn had been set ashore from the visit to the new brig. Nicholas put his father's telescope under his arm and walked up the beach toward the Head.

When he climbed up the sand to the elevation the ship was in clear sight to the northeast, standing down the coast under an easy wind. He watched her with some concern. She was searching for him and he saw no obvious way to elude her; he could go inland to the frontier posts and take up a life of trade with the Indians. This was the only escape that he could think of. If he

remained where he was the frigate's officers would undoubtedly hear of him when they came into the Sound again; word was already out that Mr. Waine's son had returned.

The *Esperanza* was fast aground in the Inlet, and even if she could be floated again he had no provisions, no crew to man her, and, even if he could secure both of these necessities, she was too well known among the fleet to afford him any safety for long. No; his life on the *Esperanza* was over; he saw clearly that he would never sail on her again.

He could not go to sea; he would not go inland. He considered taking one of the packets to Charles Town or to Virginia, and beginning life there. But the frigate was just returning from warning Charles Town and life there would probably be even more precarious than at Port Royal because his father's name, though familiar, would mean less. Besides, the weekly boat had sailed the day before.

He wondered if the frigate really would come back into the Sound. It was now to the east, nearly opposite the opening of the channel, and still bearing steadily on its course southward. He had been watching it continually, either with his naked eye or through the glass. Then of a sudden he saw her strike her sails and prepare to go about.

At the same moment a white mass attracted his eye and he turned his head to see that a brigantine had crept noiselessly down the Sound and was now opposite him entering the channel between the shoals. She was so close that when she passed he could read the letters on the stern, *Little Carpenter,* Bristol.

He did not see the relationship between the brigantine's clearing the port and the frigate's changing its course; he thought the frigate had intended to come into the Sound and had missed the opening of the channel. But as he watched her he saw her sail again past the opening. Then it suddenly occurred to him that she was preparing to intercept the brigantine.

When the brigantine turned northward out of the channel the frigate lay dead ahead of her. Nicholas saw her loose her upper sails and lie to, and a few minutes later the vessels were within speaking distance. The frigate lowered a boat and it was rowed across the water between them and disappeared behind the hull of the brigantine.

He wondered at this procedure for an instant, then it struck him that the officers were making sure of the character of the brigantine and making sure that he and Quinn were not aboard!

He sat down on the sand and watched intently through the telescope. This was the first specific detail he had witnessed with his own eyes which showed unmistakably that he was being sought. It gave him a peculiar feeling in his breast. All his life he had fled; he had had them close upon him at times, but always he had been able to see safety ahead if he could but reach it; he had never been in a trap with His Majesty's hounds nosing about the door. He began to realize for the first time that he was in serious danger of being caught.

After about a quarter of an hour he saw the small boat return to the man-o'-war and the two vessels separate; the brigantine continued her way northward, the frigate put about once more and sailed down the coast.

She passed the opening of the channel again and in an hour was a speck in the southwest, at a point, he guessed, nearly opposite the end of the Island and the mouth of Topsail Inlet. He had no fear that the frigate would venture up the Inlet, on account of her draught, and besides, she would have no suspicion that the brig for which they were searching up and down the shore lay just beyond the tops of the pine trees.

The water shaded into a hard gray as the sun dropped behind the clouds;

Nicholas rose and returned to the house by way of the beach.

Three days remained before the frigate would return; when three days had passed, then, he must be gone—or at least have prepared the way for going. Where he should go, and how, perplexed him, but he thought he should be able to answer both questions when an answer was demanded.

THE break with Quinn cast its unmistakable shadow ahead, and Nicholas saw it that afternoon. He walked with him on the beach before sunset.

"You are preoccupied, Captain Quinn," said Nicholas.

He was turning over in his mind, he said, projects for their escape.

They walked as far as the Head and stood there for a time with the wind stiff in their faces, Quinn looking back down the sand, Nicholas with his eyes on the misty blue shore across the Sound.

"What is your plan?" Nicholas asked him, looking at him ironically out of the corners of his eyes.

Quinn started slightly, then said, "To stay where we are until they come to get us. When they come I will put my back against the wall of your father's house and draw my saber."

Nicholas looked at him for a moment, then spoke; his words came with a laugh but his eyes were cold.

"I should season your plan of salvation with a dash of the spice of cunning. Perhaps, with a dash of cunning, we might be able to save the lives of some of the crew of the frigate, all of which would probably otherwise be sacrificed to you and me against the wall. It would be more humane for us to return to the *Esperanza* and stay there until the frigate departed."

There had never been in Nicholas's mind the slightest sense of equality with Quinn; for years he had served under him in rank, but he felt no subordination. It pleased him to be first officer rather than captain; a captain was often hanged from his yard when matters went too long against the wishes of the crew. Sometimes the mate was hoisted beside him, but usually the mate was left, if he knew the art of maintaining his balance.

He felt no subordination to Quinn even aboard ship. He ate with Quinn, went ashore with him among native villages in tropical oceans, treated him in a friendly way. In time Quinn had apparently ceased to expect subordination and had accepted equality; but Nicholas had never accepted equality and, when he rose one stage in Quinn's mind, found himself unquestionably the superior. It had taken Quinn months to suspect it, but Nicholas thought he suspected it now.

He went to his room that night and sat for an hour before his fire. In three days the frigate would be in the Sound; the time was drawing close when he should have to act. What should he do?

There was more of relief in his mind than of sorrow at the expected break with Quinn. Now that he could imagine the break he thought it gave him more freedom; he had not allowed himself to be tied down by Quinn, but he had considered him, he thought, in examining the problem of their escape. If he broke with him, he had only himself to consider. He knew that it was futile to try to foresee what might come of the break; he would solve the problem without consulting Quinn further. Quinn could get out in his own way; if he didn't get out, it was no great matter.

The question of Dirque troubled him more. Where was Dirque? What was he waiting for? He thought there was not the slightest doubt that Dirque would appear again, and he wanted him to appear as soon as possible. He wanted to take his adversaries singly, if he could arrange it so; he wanted to finish with the seaman before the frigate returned, otherwise he might have more

men to deal with than he had hands.

But granting that Dirque could be brought into the light in time, and that Nicholas was free to fashion his escape to suit his own fancy, disregarding Quinn, what course of action should he follow?

He got no more answer to the question now than when he had put it to himself on other occasions. To run away ignominiously to the hills and hide was an alternative that he would not even consider; if he could not do the thing more gracefully than that he would follow Quinn's advice and put his back against the wall. . . .

THERE was a knock at the door and Daniel entered, bearing a pewter pitcher of fresh drinking-water.

"Water, maussah."

Nicholas sat up in his chair and looked at Daniel while he closed the door. In a minute he said:

"You are very, very careful, Daniel, I trust."

"Keerful, maussah?"

"Very, very careful of what you say. With them, I mean." And Nicholas nodded his head toward the slave quarters.

"Dan'l say nothin', maussah. Dan'l very deef when black folks talk." He watched Nicholas's face until he saw him smile, then turned toward the fireplace laughing to himself.

"'Dan'l been trav'lin' wid Maus' Nich'las; wha Maus' Nich'las been?' 'Ast Maus' Nich'las,' says Dan'l."

"And yet be not too tame neither," said Nicholas, veering. "They might suspect that you had something to conceal—and you have nothing to conceal, you know. You have traveled; that's all."

"'Ey don' suspec' nothin', maussah."

Daniel tended the fire and swept the hearth with the grass broom.

"Care, Daniel," said Nicholas, folding his hands, "is a quality worth your attention. A man is but a poor helmsman of his life at best and never lands on shore at the exact spot he steers for; if he lands even in the country he desires he has done well—and I think he can never do that without care. Some men will tell you that your destiny is sealed and that all the care in the world will not enable you to change it, but I believe that a man, with care, can break the seal on his destiny and rewrite some of the lines. I have known some men whom I suspect of doing that, but they have been so careful in rewriting the lines that you can hardly distinguish the words written by Fate from the words written by themselves. At most, Fate writes but the text of your play; you can choose your own interpretation of the principle part if you study it carefully. . . . Our play, to be specific, seems to be tending toward tragedy; we are the squirrel pursued by the dog. Shall we reach the tree?" He paused. "Tragedies please me not; we must reach the tree. In other words, we must go. And how shall we go?"

At the mention of "squirrel" Daniel showed a great relief, like a tired swimmer who finds that he can touch bottom after all.

"Dan'l been castin' round his eyes, maussah, an' he keep on seein' de sloop."

With the last word he snapped Nicholas an oblique glance.

"What sloop?" said Nicholas, fixing him with a stare.

"*De* sloop, maussah; Cap'n Mullins's sloop."

Nicholas looked straight at him with no expression in his eyes. His mind seemed to have flown aloft at Daniel's first mention of the boat; he did not seem interested in his question of what boat it was.

Then slowly his spirit seemed to ignite. His eyes burned as those of a child burn at the sight of home after a long absence. But the rest of him did not

change; he stood up calmly as if to stretch his legs.

"Of course," said he; "of course. Daniel, I am inclined to believe sometimes that I have no instincts—only reason; that through some peculiar whim of nature, instincts that should have been given to me were given to you, leaving me room for more reason. Not the sloop; the sloop is too small. But the germ of our freedom has been born. Stay close by the house; your master may need you suddenly."

IT WAS the next day that Thomas Marshall, the Governor's son, came to the hall and spoke the word "pirates."

His news was that an unexpected trace of the pirates had been found through the keeper of the Topsail Tavern. This man, one Thomas Veal, had come to the Governor's office that noon, desiring to speak with the Governor. Marshall told him his father was engaged and talked to him himself.

A middle-aged man, obviously a seaman, had appeared at the tavern two days before and asked for lodging. Veal had been on the watch for strangers since the posting of the notice about the outlaws and, though he had let the man have a bed, had observed what he did and attended when he spoke. But the man said little; he claimed to be a member of the crew of the *Beaufain*, London, a bark which had cleared that day, and to have missed his sailing.

He was now looking for employment and wanted board and lodging for a day or two until he found it. The innkeeper described him as heavier than the average, though not stout, not over tall, with broad hands whose backs were unusually hairy.

On the first night the man observed the notice posted on the wall of the long room. The innkeeper, not knowing the man and having been taught to regard strangers with suspicion, kept his eyes upon him all the while he was spelling out the words. Veal said he thought the man had smiled once, though he could not see his face clearly. When he had read it he sat down in a corner away from the fireplace, ordered rum, and remained quiet all evening. There had been some talk among the seamen in the room about the notice; one man had been on a ship that was boarded by "Captain James" and he remembered him well—a man much as the placard described him.

The strange seaman sat with his arms on the table before him, looking in the direction of his glass; whether he was listening or absorbed in his thoughts was not apparent. Later, when the room became empty, he lighted a short clay pipe, walked heavily to the window on Bay Street, and stood for a good while with his back to the room.

"The stranger went to his room about midnight," said Marshall with a laugh, "and, according to Veal, hung his hat over the keyhole."

The next morning the seaman appeared in the room at daybreak and inquired of Veal's wife—Veal was in the kitchen building the fires—as to who was responsible for the notice. She told him of the frigate and of its being expected back in the Sound in a day or two. At this he cocked his eyebrow. She asked him if he knew anything of the men described in the paper. He shook his head.

He was gone all day, returning late that night as the innkeeper was covering the fire in the long room. He paid his bill very early next morning with a gold coin and disappeared. The innkeeper had reported it to the Governor's office, hoping that if anything came of it he should be remembered for a few pounds of the reward.

Marshall related this hastily. When he had finished he laughed.

"Do you know of a more beautifully mysterious mariner? He paid his reckoning with gold, mind you. Mariners

who have lost their berth usually can't pay their bills at all.

"We shall look about for him tomorrow, not to arrest him, but to ask him a few questions. No need in the world to be alarmed; I simply pass it on to you as the day's gossip."

"You must have some idea where that man is," said Nicholas.

Marshall hesitated.

"An idea," he said.

"Where do you think he is?"

"It is my own idea and I may be mistaken. I think I saw him this morning crossing the Sound. I went to Port Royal this morning with Mullins in the *Aurora*. We met a man rowing a strange boat—almost ran him down in the haze. I thought of it later when I talked to Veal."

NICHOLAS had risen at dawn and walked to the beach on the Sound. He carried the brass telescope, which he had brought in his box from the ship, out of force of habit, for the air was misty and he hardly expected to use it. He had a plan in his mind, misty and indistinct like the morning; he wanted to walk with it.

He was almost opposite the house, returning, when the mist lifted on a gust of wind. Before him in the Sound lay the elder Waine's new brig, *The Beaufort Merchant,* pulling at her anchor-chain on the incoming tide, her upper rigging faint through the clouds like pencil lines imperfectly erased. Beyond the stern, much farther away, he could see the sloop, *Aurora,* on its course across the Sound.

But what caught his eye to hold it was the dim outline of a small boat rowed by a man. It was not the short, flat-bottomed scull of the negro oyster-gatherers; it was longer and had a line to its gunwales. He thought it looked like the *Esperanza's* boat, and wondered if Daniel could have taken their boat out on the water.

Then he put the glass quickly to his eye. The mist fell again at once, but he had seen Dirque.

The blood rushed tingling through his cheeks; Dirque was coming closer. He stood stiff on the sand, his feet apart, the telescope across his breast, gazing into the fog.

Dirque was closing in. Nicholas saw that his greatest peril lay in waiting for Dirque to act; he could not wait; he must take the offensive.

It whirled in his mind all morning. Dirque must be got out of the way; with him still at large, Nicholas's plans might be disastrously interrupted at any moment. He thought he could find the man; if he were on the Island there was but one place he could stay, unless he chose to sleep in the woods, which Nicholas though was not likely. Having money, he would probably take a bed at Mullins's house, as any other traveler would do.

He did not know his plan in detail. If he saw the man he would shoot him. That was the first thing. One thing he knew: he would have no mercy. The hunters were closing round; he would kill him as easily and as quickly as possible. There would be no chivalry; chivalry was a luxury. He would fire at his back if he got the opportunity, and he would be careful to guard his own back from a like assault. It was a matter of utility now; courtesy was put aside. . . .

THE next day Nicholas went to Port Royal. He did not go by the ferry, as most people did, but took his servant along and had himself rowed thence in his own boat. They left *Wythewood* before dawn and were nearly across the Sound by the time the drowsy sun peeped over the rim of the smoking marshes. Under his cloak Nicholas carried a pistol, for, as he said, the character trait in the Al-

mighty that moved him to greatest admiration was His real capacity for inventing effectual surprises.

He proceeded at once to the long room of the Topsail Tavern, and took a chair at a table near the end of the casement overlooking the river and the Sound beyond. Daniel brought him coffee, a slice of hot beef, and a dish of the little rice-cakes for which the Tavern was becoming famous. Nicholas lighted a pipe and smoked it over a second cup of coffee while Daniel was breakfasting in the kitchen, gazing all the time steadfastly down the bay. When Daniel stepped beside him he lifted his head quickly, as if he had come a long way in that brief instant.

Nicholas sat at his table until the afternoon ferry sailed for the Island. During that time an observer would have seen nothing startling in what he did. Periodically through the day the negro returned from somewhere and seated himself on the floor with his legs crossed, between the table and the window.

Once he brought with him when he came back a man with a misshapen nose and only one leg. The other leg was a stout, weather-stained rod of oak, strapped on just above the knee and braced at the hip. A cord was strung through a button-hole of his jacket, the other end disappearing into a pocket as though it might have been tied to a watch. Daniel preceded him into the room and led him before Nicholas.

Nicholas stared in his eyes, as if taking an inventory of what was contained in the man's soul. In a minute the newcomer's expression began to change into one of resentment; the eyebrows drew taut, the upper lip stiffened at the corners.

Nicholas smiled and lifted his stare.

"All right," said he. "I will take you."

Nicholas brought a sovereign from his purse and pushed it over the top of the table.

The negro conducted the sailor away.

Two hours later Daniel brought in another. Nicholas examined him silently, as he had the first, then nodded and pushed a second sovereign over the table.

When Daniel entered the room again, he came alone. He looked at his master and shook his head.

"Ah, Daniel," said Nicholas, complacently, " 'Let not your heart be troubled.' Others will come. They have friends. . . . Now you must go shopping for me. Six pieces of soap, bath soap, from the barber's, two streets down. And one dozen handkerchiefs from Holliday's, of the best quality of linen that he carries. Here is a note, saying that these things are for me. Show it to the shopkeepers. Being menials, they may question you."

An hour later, with his parcel under his arm, Nicholas paid his bill at the Tavern and sauntered to the *Aurora's* dock, Daniel beside him, looking attentively at the ground.

"Five will be enough. This pair and three more—and preferably with two legs apiece. I like not only legs. An only leg is likely to be as much of a grumbler as an only child. Though you can not be too hard to please, neither. Give each man a sovereign—nay, give each leg a sovereign."

He handed the negro the gold coins to pay out as retainers and enough to take care of himself until the following night.

"You've got your ticket?" said Nicholas.

Daniel took from his pocket the printed leave-ticket, filled in with his name, age, and height, and signed by Nicholas, which permitted him to be absent from the plantation.

"Don't lose that. When it is dark, load all five of them into the long-boat. Meet me on the bank of the creek at midnight, tomorrow."

He had Daniel repeat what he was to do, then went aboard the sloop and returned to *Wythewood.*

THE effect that this absence of Nicholas had on Quinn was out of all proportion to its importance. In itself, Quinn might not have given it much thought, but when it occurred after half a dozen other acts, all tending to show him that his importance to Nicholas was rapidly decreasing, it made him take a serious survey of his own position.

Up to then, he had felt vaguely several times that Nicholas might be preparing to discard him; he had never been comforted by the thought that he could rely on this youth. On the contrary, he was perfectly confident that he could not. As long as he possessed something that Nicholas needed, he had Nicholas bound to his side; on board the ship he had a pistol and Nicholas needed it. Now, he seemed to have nothing that Nicholas could not get along without—that he might not be well rid of. He was dependent on Nicholas for escaping; Nicholas was not dependent on him. Quinn saw clearly that Nicholas could save himself just as easily without him.

Nicholas had left him for sixteen days; what had occurred on that expedition? He had come back with a story of how he had hidden the chests, of the reappearance of one of the crew, of one thing or another, but there was not the slightest proof to Quinn that what he said was true. Indeed, he had never, as well as he could remember, discovered Nicholas to be telling an absolute truth. Just what were the precise details of Nicholas's return to the *Esperanza*? He was compelled to admit that he did not know. He had thought that, when an opportunity came, he would force his first mate to return with him to the brig and go over what had happened, step by step; if necessary, at the point of a pistol.

He was sure that Nicholas had made a map of where the treasure lay; the only thing he had to be careful of, in connection with that, was to be certain to see the map Nicholas had prepared for himself, and not be led astray by a map that he might have prepared especially for his captain. He had never been completely satisfied in his mind with the way Nicholas had acted in regard to his return to the brig.

From the time that Nicholas got back from this journey, Quinn had scarcely talked with him at all. He seemed to be forever hastening to this or that place, with hardly time for a hurried nod. He thought Nicholas avoided being alone with him. At meals, or at any of the times when others were present, he was exceedingly civil and polite, as might have been expected of a young lieutenant toward his captain, and he invariably stood when Quinn entered or quitted a room. But Quinn thought he showed a disinclination to talk with him about their personal affairs.

He could not believe that Nicholas was as unconcerned as he seemed to be; from appearances, one might have thought that he was intending to remain at *Wythewood* for the rest of his life. But he knew that a ship of war was returning and Quinn did not believe that Nicholas was ignoring the fact; beneath it all, Quinn felt certain that Nicholas's mind was busy on escape. But what was he planning? And did his plans include Quinn? Quinn again had to shake his head; he could not say.

Then Nicholas, without a word to him, left *Wythewood* before day and had not yet returned. This was the first conspicuous move Nicholas had made; Quinn thought it undoubtedly had to do with the escape. Why, then, had he not been consulted on it? Why?—except that Nicholas was building an escape for himself and did not wish his plans known.

The fear that Nicholas might be planning to abandon him was not new with Quinn; it had been growing on him for years—particularly had it haunted him since he shook Nicholas's long, firm fingers on the question of the mutiny. It

was the nature of the man; a trait that had to be accepted along with the indomitable glint in his eyes. He had persuaded Quinn to join him in ridding themselves of the crew; it was but one short step from that, thought Quinn, to persuading himself to be rid of his captain.

And beyond Nicholas's probable treachery was the King's Proclamation, and the King's ship coming in the next day; then, beyond that, a dark indeterminate sort of shadow made by the member of the crew who had reappeared—Dirque, he had no doubt. Could he possibly escape all three?

What if he betrayed Nicholas before Nicholas could betray him? What if he sought out the commanding officer of the frigate as soon as she came into the Sound? He could betray both Nicholas and Dirque at once, and ask for leniency as reward for assisting in the apprehension.

But he put this out of his mind; he had heard of masters of roving brigs doing exactly that, and they never lived long; if they were not immediately hanged in public, they very soon received a knife in private from some loyal member of the black brotherhood.

What if he combined with the sailor?

Ah! There was a thought that staggered him!

He threw on his coat and wandered out the porte-cochère and toward the forest.

Was it possible? Would not Dirque shoot him on sight? Yet he could be of great value to Dirque; he could contribute to the partnership not only his strength and the fact that he was in a position to act as spy on Nicholas, but probably the information of exactly where the treasure lay. He thought Dirque would be glad to see him. But there was very little time left. The ship was returning the next morning; in twenty-four hours whatever plan he was following would have to be ready for use.

He hesitated, however, at abandoning Nicholas; he had great faith in Nicholas's schemes. In his mind, moreover, was the uncertainty of whether he might not yet be able to save himself when Nicholas escaped. For, though he himself did not know a road to freedom, he thought that Nicholas knew one, or would when the time came. Once they were together again on the sea, it would not be difficult to get a new first mate.

IT WAS dark when he turned back along the road to *Wythewood*.

He had not gone a hundred yards when he heard footsteps behind him. He halted.

"Stand!" said he. "Who's there?"

"Good evening, Captain Quinn," said a voice. "It is none but your old messmate, Waine."

"Pleasant day?" said Quinn with some irony, after Nicholas had overtaken him.

"Shopping," replied Nicholas. "And I confess I do enjoy spending money."

"Going away?"

"Yes," said Nicholas, waiting a second or two before answering.

"When?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"The frigate comes back in the morning. Tonight?"

"I can't go tonight," said Nicholas. "The officers are coming to *Wythewood* to dinner tomorrow, and I shall have to be here to help entertain them."

Quinn drew in a deep breath and stopped on the road.

"Coming here!"

Nicholas was amused at Quinn's astonishment. Though he could not see him, the tone of his exclamation pictured him in his mind.

"You seem to have forgotten who you are," said Quinn.

Nicholas laughed good-humoredly. "I am sure they bear us no malice."

"I have no desire to see them," said the captain.

"You are quite right," Nicholas agreed. "I suggest that your old wound trouble you a bit tomorrow. You may have dinner brought to your room. Leave them to me—"

Quinn clapped a taut hand on Nicholas's forearm. "On the square, mind you! You ain't—"

Nicholas's laugh interrupted him.

"Now, now," said he, soothingly, patting him on the shoulder. "Whoever would think of such a thing? You must watch your nerves. I'm afraid this landsman's life doesn't agree with you."

"What is the plan?"

Nicholas looked at him, shaking his head as if in sadness.

"You disappoint me, Quinn," he sighed. "I should have thought that a man of your experience with the world would know better than to expect to be given, free of charge, the map out of the maze."

Quinn, in exasperation, clutched the hilt of his sword. Nicholas's ears caught the dry, metallic rattle. It was Quinn's first flash of defiance.

Nicholas conciliated. "I will come to your room in the afternoon, when the officers leave," he said. "We will talk this thing over."

He was not prepared to have the crucial point in their relations come at that moment. Three weeks before, he had set his stage for disposing of the crew and lifted the curtain at the proper instant; he had now set his stage for disposing of the captain, but the time was not yet right for the curtain. He never fired in haste or excitement; he was not the man to let himself be precipitated into a scrape before the time at which his entrance would be most effective. They reached the vicinity of the house and stopped talking. Nicholas was glad because it helped him put an end to the conversation without retreating too far.

But he would have given way even more to avoid striking before he was sure. He expected to be sure in twenty-four hours now; the frigate would return, then, after that perhaps, two swords would sing their song.

He had had his fill of Quinn.

NICHOLAS walked out at the front door an hour before breakfast. A negro, whose name he did not know, was sweeping the porch with a broom made of marsh-grass, his hands in woolen mittens, his cheeks touched with gray from the cold. He lifted his hand to his hat as Nicholas emerged from the house.

"Fros' dis mornin', Maus' Nich'las," said he.

"But tomorrow is the morning," said Nicholas. "Now what should you say, from your observations of this climate, that tomorrow would be like?"

"Lordy, sah, how's ol' nigger gwine know, when don' nobody know but de good God."

"Amen!" said Nicholas. "That is a point to be considered."

Then there came in on the still air the golden call of a bugle, splitting the morning like a shaft of sunlight; it rose on the Sound in the direction of the ocean and Nicholas knew that the frigate was coming into the bay. She had probably hung outside the opening of the channel until the pilot had light enough to bring her in.

A minute or two after the last note had trailed into silence, the trumpeter at the fort on River Point up the beach to the west flashed out the staccato reply. Nicholas descended the steps and strolled to an opening in the trees near the beach through which he could see the ship.

He watched her drop anchor. He noticed at once that she had decided to lie nearly a mile farther out than on her previous visit, hauling in now almost opposite the Head, though closer to the other shore. He wondered for a moment why she had not come farther in. She would get scarcely any protection where

she was if there happened to be a wind; she could not have been afraid of her draught, for she had come closer before. Then the reason became suddenly clear to him: she had selected the narrowest part of the Sound to facilitate the searching of ships clearing from Port Royal!

Lying near the entrance made it possible, also, to keep watch over the coasts and to slip her cables in pursuit if it became necessary.—And once more the physical aspects of how he was being sought reminded him vividly that he was a fugitive.

He turned his head to the west to Port Royal, smoking beyond the misty yellow marshes like a cluster of Indian signal-fires. His thoughts were there with the negro for a minute; Daniel held the success of the escape completely within his hands. He could wreck the whole scheme with one false move—intentional or unintentional. But Nicholas no more doubted that Daniel would be waiting in the creek at midnight than he doubted that he himself should be there.

But what did worry him was the thought, now growing into a conviction, that Dirque and Quinn had met and united against him.

"I shouldn't be surprised to find them seeking each other," he said. "The moment of danger draws near and men of little spirit begin to huddle together for encouragement."

WAINE returned from Port Royal about noon, bowed to his wife, who was rustling round the large dining-room table with an eye to knives and forks, and proceeded to the cellar to select his wine.

An hour later, Nicholas, standing at the edge of the trees, heard two bells strike on the man-o'-war; simultaneously, the captain's boat put off and bounded over the water toward Waine's pier to the thrusts of half a dozen oarsmen.

Nicholas watched it with the color back again in his cheeks; he would soon be in a position where a slip would probably mean his execution, and he gloried in it. If everything went well, on the other hand, he would be safer than ever. He turned back to the house, glancing in the mirror at the end of the hall to make sure that his hair fell over the scar.

In five minutes Nicholas and his father left the porch and walked side by side down the path to the wharf.

"I usually welcome my guests to *Wythewood* alone," said Waine, addressing Nicholas with a strange mixture of formality and tenderness, as if he had forgotten the outward manner of a father. "It is a pleasure, sir, to have your assistance."

Nicholas surprised himself by being unable to reply.

Waine waved cheerfully to Captain Blackhouse as the boat drew in; the commanding officer saluted him. Up went the oars to the vertical, shining and dripping; a rope was thrown by the sailor in the bow to one of Waine's negroes, who made it fast. A midshipman scrambled up to the surface of the dock and offered his hand to the commanding officer. Nicholas leaned over beside him and offered his hand also; he scanned the faces of the four officers. He was sure none of them could be Winton.

Captain Blackhouse was handed up and greeted Waine, while Nicholas and the midshipman offered unnecessary aid to the four lieutenants. Blackhouse, after he had caught his breath, presented his young men to Waine.

"Gentlemen," said Waine to them in reply, "allow me to introduce my son. He has just returned from a life like yours and will be able to meet you conversationally on your own ground—or water, if you prefer."

"Sailors never prefer water, sir," said Nicholas.

"Fortunately, gentlemen," said Waine, "there is something else now waiting for

you on the sideboard in the dining-room."

Mrs. Waine and her daughter stood in the hall and curtsied as the officers entered. Waine, with the assistance of Blackhouse, succeeded in announcing the names of the four juniors. He then led them straight on to the sideboard in the dining-room, where he removed the glass stoppers from two decanters. Moses brought in a tray with water and eyed the commanding officer's ornamented breast while Nicholas lifted the pitcher and made the superfluous offer of diluting their Scotch or rye.

The officers stayed until four-thirty. Dinner lasted from two until three-thirty and the remaining hour sped on the wings of wine.

At precisely four-thirty, Moses entered and begged to inform Mr. Waine that a sailor was outside who begged to inform the commanding officer that four-thirty had arrived.

AS THE others stepped into the hall and prepared to leave, Nicholas drew the one named Elder aside.

"Er—" said Nicholas, "I don't mean to take advantage of having you in a position where you can scarcely refuse a small favor, but I really believe it will not cost you much trouble. You are in charge of the *Challenger* tonight, aren't you, sir?"

Elder damned his luck but was afraid he was.

"Well," said Nicholas," what I have on my mind is this. I am rather indebted to several of my friends here and I had planned tonight to take these friends for a sail in my father's brig. May go up as far as Charles Town. I dare say most of them will be glad to get the fresh air." Elder grinned. "Of course I made these plans before I realized that your ship was searching outgoing vessels. Now I wondered if you would feel all right about letting us slip through?"

Elder patted him on the shoulder and nodded his head slowly. "It will be all right," he said in a low voice, looking Nicholas in the eye. "A mere formality; perfectly pointless in a case like this."

"If there is one of your pirates aboard you may hold me personally responsible," said Nicholas, laughing.

"All right," laughed he. "Certainly."

They shook hands. Nicholas was very much obliged to him. Hoped he wouldn't get into any trouble with the old man by indulging him in this little whim.

Amid a good deal of waving the officers departed. Nicholas watched the boat put back to the frigate, then when it was out of sight beyond the trees, he went to his room and put his clothes into his box.

Once more he was prepared to strike. In his father's brig he could now pass unmolested out to sea. He would head at once for the West Indies, there to outfit her with half a dozen more guns, to augment his pack of wolves, give her a different coat of paint, and, God willing, a more poetic name. What could ever be accomplished in a ship called *The Beaufort Merchant*? He thought he should like to put his tongue well into his cheek and christen her *The Dove*.

Between him and freedom now remained two sets of obstacles; he did not fear either, but both would require care.

His plan in regard to the brig was this. The vessel, he reasoned, would be occupied by the second mate, a man whom he had heard his father refer to as Peters, and by one watch consisting of five or six seamen, the other watch being ashore. Of these five or six, probably all but one would be below asleep, or cold drunk; there would probably be one man to deal with. He could be overpowered and the rest of the crew tied up.

He would leave the five men now being enlisted in Port Royal on board while Daniel rowed him back to shore; Daniel would return to the brig and be responsible. The sun would rise at six-

forty; at five-thirty a boat would be sent to the Head to take him off. With God's love, he would be there waiting for it; he would come aboard the brig and with her would drop down the channel on the tide which would at that time still be on the ebb.

The other set of obstacles was represented by Dirque and Quinn. Before he could stand on the beach and wait for the boat to take him finally from his native island, he knew he would have to contend with them, and they were working against him in the dark. What their plan was he did not know.

If Quinn knew of Daniel's mission to Port Royal and what Nicholas intended to do with the men the negro enlisted, he would probably avail himself and Dirque of the information and attack Nicholas at that point, with the intention of sailing away themselves on the brig and leaving him, or his body, behind.

Or, they might give him the honor of taking the brig and, when he returned to the Island, do away with him and board her themselves.

Or, they might try to hide away somewhere on board until they were at sea.

OVER him, like a thundershower that would not break, hung the shadow of the boatswain; the time had come now for him to know where this Dirque was and what he was doing. It occurred to him that Quinn, provided he was now in league with Dirque, and this he did not doubt, would get into comunication with him as soon as possible if left to himself; Quinn had doubtless agreed to tell Dirque whatever he was able to find out about the details of the escape and where the money had been hidden and one thing and another; if Nicholas could tell Quinn something he had not known before, he could be reasonably sure, he thought, that Quinn would carry the news at once to Dirque. Nicholas, then, could pretend to depart on some errand or other and follow him; he would probably lead him straight to the seaman. With both of them helpless and unsuspecting before him—why not shoot the twain?

The idea twisted and tumbled about in his mind as he was dressing that night. Why not shoot point-blank in their faces and be finished with them? He lifted his razor from his cheek and held it for an instant absent-mindedly before his pursed lips. But there could be no shooting; it would have to be done with a sword or, more easily, with a knife. A shot would arouse someone.

His shaving finished, he dropped his cloak round his shoulders and went to Quinn's room to inform him that he was off for the evening.

He found Quinn standing in the middle of the room as if he had suddenly arrested himself at the sound of the door opening.

He gathered the cloak round his figure, extending one arm. "Hark you! At thirty minutes after five a boat will be at the Head, on the eastern beach. We go to sea on the tide that runs at daybreak. Everything has been arranged. Meet me there and all is over."

Quinn continued to look at him; in a minute he said, his eyes cold: "Do you plan to put to sea in a rowboat?"

Nicholas shook his head. "I am afraid the captain has but little faith in his lieutenant. No. We shall put to sea in a brig; a very trim little brig, called, in stark prose, *The Beaufort Merchant*."

Quinn raised his eyebrows as if surprised, but Nicholas felt certain that he had known before. He thought there was no harm in telling him more of the plans; he prided himself on winning through the perfection of his skill rather than through the perfection of his power of secrecy. In addition to this, he wanted Quinn to be on the beach at dawn; he had saved that duel for weeks. He

could have killed Quinn half a dozen times before this; he had refrained for the sake of killing him with some grace. By telling Quinn the true plans he could be sure that Quinn would be there.

But if he were not hindered he would probably be there in company with Dirque; this Nicholas planned to prevent by following him when he went to meet Dirque and following Dirque when the two parted.

"Suppose you are discovered tonight?" said Quinn.

"Do not wait for me," replied Nicholas. "If I am not there by six o'clock, go without me—and give the first priest you capture a shilling to say a mass for my soul. If I am not there I shall be in purgatory."

"You have a map of where the money lies?"

"The negro who will be in the boat will be able to make a map—but I shall be there to explain the bearings to you myself. Don't concern yourself about my not being there; I never fail to keep an appointment."

Nicholas turned toward the door.

"Have you thought how you will pass the frigate?" said Quinn.

"There is a countersign," replied Nicholas over his shoulder. "That I will bring with me. . . . I must bring something, you know, or you would be sorry to see me come."

"Just bring your precious self," said Quinn.

Nicholas put back his head and laughed long. He opened the door and faced about. "Five-thirty. Bring along your spare clothes—and any little souvenirs from about the house that may catch your fancy." He laughed long again. "*Au revoir.*"

In three minutes there was a clatter of hoofs beneath the window, diminishing rapidly in the direction of the gate.

NICHOLAS judged that it was after eleven when Quinn opened the door at the carriage entrance. He could not see his watch, but when he left the house the clock in the hall had showed ten-thirty; it had taken him, he figured, ten minutes to gallop down the lane and lead the horse back after he had got out of hearing. He had drawn his cloak about him and waited against a tree at a point from which he could observe both the front door and the port-cochère; from years of practice he had learned to guess the passing of time with a good deal of accuracy, and he judged that he had been waiting there about thirty minutes.

Quinn came out quickly—a line of dim light widening in a flash to a rectangle, the shadow of a man against the radiance, the line of light again, then unbroken blackness.

Then he heard a bell from the man-o'-war floating like a spirit. Subconsciously he counted six, and he knew that he was nervous; the half-hour had seemed longer.

He heard Quinn cross the space in front of the house; a swift low crushing of brittle leaves, or a dry snap of a twig. Once or twice he thought he could distinguish his shadow. He moved quickly as if he had passed over that ground before. He seemed to be going to the north of the garden on a path that led to the beach.

Nicholas, without a sound, unsheathed his sword. He had no doubt that he should soon see Dirque; soon press the point of that sword to his useless throat. Then distinctly he felt himself shudder.

He wondered at that; he never shuddered, never had shuddered—not, at any rate, after the first twelve months or so. What was the matter with him? Now and then he seemed to be losing his hold on himself. He walked away for a few steps rapidly as if to leave the shudderer behind.

He was compelled to move slowly after he crossed the driveway; he knew that over all that ground lay the half-exposed, gnarled coils of the giant roots of the live-oaks ready to trip him and send him clattering. The moss hung about him and brushed its trails across his face as though he were in a dungeon with a thousand spiders.

He heard Quinn ahead of him once soon after he began to follow; then he heard no other sound of him.

When he came to the last tree on the edge of the beach he stopped and listened, somewhat alarmed. Over the water some stars were shining, diluting the night; under the North Star and a few points to the east was a cluster of redder lights which he knew marked the position of the *Challenger*. There was no sound of Quinn. Down the shelving sand the small waves washed with a soft sound, as if someone sat not far away finger to lips and signaled the darkness to be still.

But Quinn; where was Quinn? He seemed to have vanished. Nicholas moved cautiously along the edge of the trees, listening for a sound of a voice or a whisper or a step; nothing but the gentle, moist swishing of the water and the wind.

Then the resonant bell of the frigate sang the half-hour, and something inside Nicholas told him that he had lost Quinn. He had to go; in thirty minutes Daniel with the five men would be expecting him. They would be impatient men, in all probability, not the sort who would care to be kept waiting. He knew that he would have to abandon his search for Quinn at once in order to be there on time; it was a twenty-minute walk in daylight. Now he could not possibly do it in less than half an hour. Quinn had escaped him.

HE FELT his way back along the path. He knew approximately where the turns were and was able by the light of the stars to distinguish the outlines of masses. Occasionally the larger trees growing in the tangle on either side closed in and cut off the thin illumination from above and he had to step on blindly in the dark.

He crossed a cleared space, then entered a path again through a bank of underbrush. Ten slow paces in he halted and listened. Nothing; even the breeze had momentarily dropped.

Three paces more.

He was about to proceed when he thought he heard a sound. He had not noticed it the instant he stopped; it had forced itself gradually upon his senses. It was scarcely audible. He could distinguish it, he thought, only because of its rhythm. It was a sound that faintly resembled the dripping of water, though faster than water can drip—and more delicate too in the click it made. He found himself unable to judge the distance it must be from him; was it faint because remote, or was it very close to him and faint because of its nature? It was a familiar sound—

Then he felt the hair on the crown on his head stiffen. Beyond a doubt, it was the ticking of a watch!

Nicholas stood immovable, holding his breath. In the spinning of his mind he found one incongruous corner deciding that the man must be a person of wealth to own a watch, then refuting itself with the thought that the man was a thief. That he could be unconscious of Nicholas's presence seemed impossible. What was he doing, then? What was he waiting for?

Nicholas crouched. At once the watch ticked more loudly.

Nicholas put out his hand and touched a damp face. The figure did not stir.

But Nicholas did not expect it to; it would not be lying in the midst of barren November woods if it were conscious. He laid his hand on the man's breast. There was no heart beat.

For an instant Nicholas thought it

must be Dirque, murdered in a disagreement by Quinn. It could not be Quinn because there was a short beard on the chin; Dirque might have grown a beard. His heart quickened with the wish that it might be Dirque.

He ran his hand along the man's side, touched the watch hanging free from a cord through a button-hole of the jacket, then, at his hip, felt the hard upper end of the brace to a wooden leg. He stood up.

Memories rushed into his mind so fast as almost to daze him. The long room of the Tavern—Daniel—a man with a wooden leg and a cord through a buttonhole! What in the name of God did this mean?

At that moment the bell floated in once more from the frigate, and he knew it was midnight. If Daniel heard the bell, he would probably be expecting Nicholas to take form out of the air before the eighth stroke. He raised his sword, point in front of him; if the murderer, whoever he was, tried to stop him he would be prepared. He stepped over the body and hurried on as fast as he could through the trees.

He had not gone far when he heard a cough some distance ahead of him. He paused and whistled.

When he heard his signal answered, he took a deep breath and smiled in exquisite joy; he had not realized until he left Daniel in Port Royal just how alone in the world he was without him. He had come to like the sensation of loneliness less than he had when he was younger. He was glad in a deep, enveloping way to hear Daniel's whistle.

A MOMENT later he came to the edge of the creek and, in the thinner dark, due to the absence of trees and the wide fields of the marshes, he saw the huge shadow of the negro standing on the bank. Several men were round him, one or two getting to their knees from having lain on the ground. He stepped toward Nicholas.

"Maussah?"

"You are punctual, Daniel," said Nicholas.

Daniel bowed his head and Nicholas patted him on the shoulder.

"So these are the men of courage and strength I sent you for?"

He looked at the varied dimensions of their dim forms.

"Your shadows please me," he said. "How many of you are there?"

"Five, Maussah," said Daniel.

Nicholas counted them in a glance, half expecting to find only four. But there were five.

"Enow, I think, to make an emperor!" said he. "Now, tell me some of your names? What is yours, comrade?"

"Spark," said one.

"Call me Jowl," said another.

"Good!" said Nicholas. "You'll be bosun. I like a man with the courage of christening himself. As for me, call me Captain James."

There was a stir among them as they heard who he was.

"Fie, Daniel! I think you forgot to tell them who their master was to be. But never mind. Now, come close to me; I like the way you mumble."

They gathered in front of him, Daniel at his back.

"Let me put a word or two in your ears, you Spark and Jowl and company." He began slowly, his chin lifted, his eyelids lowered. "I plan to take you with me on a voyage—a voyage of retribution, of retrieval. A pilgrimage, in short, to collect what the world owes us. . . . The world, my children, is a bad debtor and pays not except when urged. Come with me and we will urge it. It will cost you only two things: give me obedience and loyalty and I will make you rich. I supply the ship, the skill to navigate her, the strategy to maneuver her in battle. I have plied

this trade before. I know my business. I am not raising in your minds hopes I shall not fill.

"Now, our ship, a brig of seven guns, not three months out of the builders' hands, lies in the Sound. If you care to come, I will take you aboard of her now and sail with you at dawn. What say you?"

There was a growl from them in immediate response.

"Good! You answer well. I think we shall prosper. . . . Now, we shall row alongside this brig, the nearer light you see is hers, and when the watch—which consists of one man, with four below in the fo'c's'le probably drunk, and one second mate, a Mr. Peters, asleep in the cabin, likewise probably drunk—when the watch shall hail us, I will say I am young Waine, the son of the owner, and wish to see Peters. The watch will drop us a lantern and a ladder. I will go up and Daniel will come after me.

"I will then put a pistol to the unfortunate fellow's mouth and tell him that if he moves I will give him a pill that many a gallant chap before him has found hard to swallow. While I am entertaining him with such persiflage, you, Daniel, will bind him fast with your rope, gag him, and tie him up to the bulwarks. Then, my doves, you will be invited to come aboard. You will post yourselves at the fo'c's'le hatch and allow no one to come on deck. But do not take a life; we shall need those five lives to help us to the Indies. Tie them up and gag them. While you are doing this, I shall be paying a call on the second mate. You all have knives?"

There was another growl, though sharper than before, as if they were impatient to begin.

Nicholas waved toward the boat.

"Gentlemen, I lead the way."

He stepped in and picked his way over the thwarts to the stern. Daniel followed him to take the rudder. Four of them fell to the oars with a will; the fifth, with a great heave, shoved her off from the mud and leaped into the bow.

They slipped down the tortuous creek, hidden below the surface of the marsh-grass. Nicholas, standing, could see the bleary light of the brig, riding half a mile to windward in the Sound. Up the bay, on the cape at River Point, gleamed the large, sleepy eye of the lighthouse, rising on the northeast bastion of the fort. The lights lower and to the east, those of the sloop-o'war commissioned to patrol the harbor and discourage pirates. Beyond the brig, toward the sea, dim with the distance, the lights of the *Challenger*.

Nicholas thought the sky was beginning to cloud over; already in the east the stars was obscured. The air was sharp; he felt his cheeks scraped clean by the wind. The boat began to pitch as it emerged from the creek and faced the broad sweep of the Sound.

Half-way out a wave shot hissing over the bow.

"Hell's hinges!" mumbled the man farthest forward, shaking the sleeve of his jacket.

Nicholas was looking at the brig's light, now no longer a star but a ship's lantern; he continued to look, as if no word had been spoken.

Who killed the man with the wooden leg? And why? Nicholas sat down in the stern.

DANIEL knelt in the bottom, steering with his right arm, his eye on the brig's lantern, fluttering about like a will-o'-the-wisp over the long-boat's bow as she rolled.

Nicholas put his mouth close to the negro's ear.

"Did you bring six men from Port Royal?"

"Five, maussah."

"One of them with a wooden leg?"

"Yassah."

Nicholas puckered his lips and touched them with his forefinger.

"How long did you wait for me in the Creek?"

"Um, 'bout harf-hour, maussah."

"Did anything unusual happen?"

"Nawsah, maussah."

"Did you sleep?"

Daniel did not reply for a moment, then, "Maybe two winks, maussah. No mo'."

Nicholas stood up again.

They came alongside the brig without being hailed.

" 'Hoy, brig!" called Nicholas, not very loudly.

There was a scamper of feet over the deck, a muffled God-save-us! then a thick voice coming down from the bulwarks. " 'Hoy!"

"Hello," said Nicholas. "Is this Bryce?" He happened to remember the name of one of the crew.

"No, sir. Bryce's ashore," said the watch. Then, more gruffly, "What do you want?"

"I am Mr. Waine," said Nicholas. "I want to see Mr. Peters. Lower us a lantern and a ladder."

After a space, a smoky light was let down on a rope; then a ladder. The seaman in the bow caught it.

Nicholas put his hand on the men's shoulders to steady himself as he stepped down the boat, sliding up and down on the gleaming rollers. He could see his crew more distinctly now, though, from the position of the lantern, their faces were in shadow; they looked red and black, red on the hands and on the strong line of their jaws and on the backs of their necks divided by the tarry twists of black hair. He was satisfied with Daniel's selection.

"I will signal you," said Nicholas, softly. "You in the stern first."

Without more ado, he grasped the swinging ladder and climbed up, his wide cloak bulging outward like a bell. When he laid his hands on the gunwales, he felt the ladder pulled taut again as Daniel followed him.

The watch was apparently only-half-conscious. He looked at Nicholas through heavy eyes and said nothing. When Mr. Waine snapped his gun out of his belt and presented the open end of the barrel to his face, he rubbed his eyes and peered about. Daniel bound him with the cord and tied him unprotesting against the rail, where he proceeded to go back to sleep.

Nicholas leaned over the bulwarks and waved to the men, who were watching him. Then he hauled up the lantern and set it on the gunwales, beside the ladder. He watched down the rungs, observing the men as they came up. Four ascended and he saw the man in the bow make the painter fast to the ladder, preparatory to taking the climb.

"Go to the fo'c's'le hatch," he said to the four. "Wait there until I come."

They went forward as the ladder began to creak. Nicholas grasped his pistol by the barrel. When the fifth man raised his head over the level of the bulwarks, Nicholas crushed his skull by a widely-swung blow on the temple with the butt of the pistol. He seized him by the collar as the body began to droop, and hauled him over the rail.

"Behold, Daniel," said he, "your long-lost colleague, Señor Henri Dirque!"

Daniel stood like a tower.

"Quickly, now," said Nicholas. "The belt."

Daniel recovered himself with a jerk.

In a moment the leather money-belt was removed. Nicholas weighed it and found it still heavy; he hung the straps over his shoulder. Then he ordered Daniel to make a rope fast under the arms and lower the body into the sound, cutting the rope when he felt the burden lighten upon contact with the water.

WHEN the watch on the frigate rang three bells, Nicholas was, for the third time in three weeks, seated in the stern of

the *Esperanza's* long-boat with Daniel at the oars in front of him and success at his back; once again he had succeeded in bringing about what he had planned.

The crew of *The Beaufort Merchant* lay bound and gagged in their bunks, peacefully sleeping off the effects of their rum; the second mate sat in the cabin, tied securely to a chair. Nicholas had gathered the four remaining members of his crew and given them their instructions: the ebb tide would begin to run at about four forty-five; at the first light of day, which would come shortly after five o'clock, they would lift anchor and drop down on the current until they were near the Head; at five-thirty two of them with Daniel would put off and bring the long-boat to the Head for him. If, by any chance, it should happen that he was not there, they would wait until the sun rose, at six-forty, then go without him.

He had Daniel cook them food, served them a mug of rum apiece, left the man who wanted to be called "Jowl" in charge, and took his leave of them until daybreak.

Daniel held the boat to the ladder while Nicholas embarked, then took up the oars and rowed him ashore. When they landed, Nicholas sent Daniel to the house to fetch his box and carry it aboard the brig. As for himself, he knew he could not sleep that night. He would spend the few hours remaining before he met Quinn in walking about the country he had known as a boy, and would never see again.

FROM the east came a faint diffused light when Nicholas at last turned his feet toward the beach.

His boots glistened from the damp. By the time he reached the beach his cheeks were gray with a sheet of dew. The sand, almost as far as the knolls that bordered the meadow, was lying packed as if it had been pounded by a tide. The breakers tumbled into his vision.

His heart was throbbing as he turned and hastened up the beach toward the Head. His mind was focussed behind him. It did not seem possible that three weeks before he had been crossing the ocean that lay out there beyond the mist with twelve dissatisfied men and three chests of treasure, all of them buried now beneath land and water—all of them safe until the resurrection morning.

With an impious laugh, he saw those twelve dissatisfied men rising dripping out of their salty grave in response to Gabriel's call, then leaving the angel alone with his trumpet while they scurried over the sands of Hilton Head Island looking for the three chests. "And for me," he said. He laughed aloud at the thought.

Before him appeared the mound of sand and seagrass called the Head, descending in a swift curve to the beach. It brought him back to the present morning. Beyond, on the side toward the Sound, the negro was waiting with the *Esperanza's* boat—or would be waiting shortly. A quarter of an hour now, he thought, and he would be sitting in the stern beside the kneeling Daniel, the pair of oarsmen pulling him to the brig and freedom.

Then the mist opposite the Head seemed suddenly to congeal into the gray form of a man. A frown gathered quickly between Nicholas's eyes; then it vanished: Daniel, good Daniel.

He walked on, lowering his eyes to step over a great smooth beam half-buried in the sand.

As he crossed it there was a sharp, metallic swish. He drew up as if a rattlesnake had hissed. A point of black shot out from beneath the man's cloak, and he held a bare sword straight above his head. It was Quinn! He had forgotten that the man existed.

"You are up early, Quinn," he said, searching through the mist for the captain's eyes.

Quinn took a step toward him, saying nothing.

Nicholas flung off his cloak. He threw it behind him on the sea-worn timber.

"You should have stayed in bed twenty minutes longer, Quinn, and lived to enjoy the pleasures of old age." He ripped away the lace from his right wrist. "Dirque is dead, you know, Quinn. You are the last one. And truth to tell, I'm tired of *you*." He loosed his scabbard with the fingers of his left hand. "I'm bored with you, Quinn. You are a millstone round my neck. You are overdramatic,—coming through the mist here at the last moment, pointing at the heavens as if you were a shiny-pated friar, instead of an old pirate who has passed his prime."

He whipped his rapier singing from its sheath.

"I was saying to Daniel just yesterday that it wrung my heart to see you looking so worn. 'It's rum,' says Daniel. 'No, Daniel,' said I, 'it's that bullet we plugged him with'!"

"Bastard!"

"Ah! . . . 'That's what draws lines in our captain's face,' said I. 'That's what drinks up the moisture of his muscles'!"

"Your time has come!" cried Quinn.

"Lay on, lay on!"

Quinn swung his heavy sword ringing against Nicholas's rapier. Nicholas sprang aside and thrust, missed, recovered.

"I grow sicker and sicker of looking at you, Quinn. When I gaze upon your cooling corse I fear me I shall vomit."

Quinn thrust. Nicholas parried, thrust, recovered. Quinn was light on his feet this morning; better if he himself had slept more. No matter.

Quinn thrust again. Nicholas diverted it.

"You are eager, old man," said Nicholas. "But, take care! If you should kill me, I might prove a worse foe dead than alive—"

Quinn charged. Nicholas retreated one pace and thrust. Quinn beat the rapier away from his belly.

"*Touché?*" cried Nicholas. But he knew it had been short. The man was more formidable than he had thought. Could it be that his time had come? Where was Daniel? Fair or foul, if he could get an instant he would would whistle for Daniel. There was cool sweat on his face, cool from the freshening breeze. Call for Daniel to climb upon this man's back and stab him between the shoulders—that was a heavy sword, it was a cutlass, a damned vulgar cutlass—

He threw himself forward on his bent right knee. Quinn dropped his shoulder beneath the point.

"Give me the map," cried Quinn, "and I'll spare you."

"Spare me such nonsense!" Nicholas cried.

Nicholas thrust.

Then all in one second, Quinn knocked the point away and charged; Nicholas gave way one step, felt the beam at his heel, tried to halt, tripped and fell.

Quinn lunged upon him. The sword flashed in front of Nicholas's face, then down to the right like a darting bee and into his breast.

"There!" said Nicholas, panting. "Have it your own—way!"

Quinn tugged the blade out and stood over him.

Nicholas crouched on his knees, his hands against his breast. The wound had not yet begun to bleed.

Then he toppled over on the wet sand, his eyes shut.

Quinn bent over him. "Where's the map?"

Nicholas half opened his eyes and scrutinized him.

Then they seemed almost to laugh and he said in a loud whisper, "God has damned you now, Quinn!"

Quinn stiffened.

"God's angels, how I'll haunt you now!"

"The map!"

"I'll sail with you now! . . . You won't see me—but you'll know I'm there! Me and my everlasting curse!"

"Quiet!"

"You'll hear me on windy nights! . . . Up on some stormy spar, whistling my merry old tunes! . . . Ah . . . You've played into hell's hands now—"

"I'll cut your throat!" cried Quinn.

Nicholas held up his red hand. "The curse of blood—But, come, come! You know how we dying men will talk. The thought of dumbness loosens our tongues like liquor. . . . I'm drunk, Quinn; a little drunk. . . . And more than a little dizzy." He shut his eyes again, then opened them.

In a moment he tapped his waist.

"The belt. Take it. The way to the treasure's—in it."

Quinn tore away Nicholas's shirt and removed the belt.

"Now, go on, Quinn. I feel myself getting tired of you again. . . . Don't wait to thank me. . . . I'll come for my thanks later!"

"Good-by," said Quinn.

"Oh, no!" cried Nicholas. "*Au revoir!*"

Quinn recoiled.

"And send me Daniel to bury me."

Quinn got up from his knees, scowling at him in silence.

Then Nicholas, looking between the wrinkled ankles of Quinn's sand-powdered boots, saw Daniel's black face crystalizing out of the fog.

Quinn, watching Nicholas, saw the expression of his mouth change. He took it to be pain.

"Can I do anything for you?" he said.

"I think perhaps you can, Quinn," said Nicholas.

"What is it? Speak up. The tide's running."

"Quinn, for old time's sake—just for old time's sake, could you prop these bones of your old comrade against the side of this thrice-damned timber? Lying prone this way I can't see it very well."

"See what?"

"Why, your death, Quinn!" laughed Nicholas. "You're about to die!"

Quinn whirled about.

But Daniel was upon him with a roar, hammering a knife into him anywhere.

"Enough, Daniel!" said Nicholas. "You give him wounds enough—to slay a Caesar!"

NICHOLAS told him to cut some splinters from the beam and build a fire.

He chipped at the timber, whining like a dog. Then he gathered the chips into a heap and struck a light from the pistol. When it was burning, he wrapped Nicholas tightly in his cloak and moved him gently over the sand until he was near the blaze.

The little flames fought with the damp wood, casting up volumes of blue smoke which the wind, eddying round the Head from the north, chased now here, now there, the thin aroma trailing off through the breeze.

He sat beside it, near the beam, holding Nicholas's head in his lap and rubbing his forehead now and then with his hands warmed at the fire. Once in a while he breathed in the odor as if it strengthened him. He was inarticulate; he could not comprehend it except as an act of the supernatural.

After a time he laid Nicholas's head gently on the sand and walked over to where Quinn was lying; he picked him up by the foot and dragged the body across the beach and threw it into the marsh-grass.

Then he came back again.

"The belt, Daniel," said Nicholas. "Burn the belt."

Daniel shook the damp sand off the belt and laid it on the fire. Then he sat down and lifted Nicholas's head.

"You have much to talk about—Daniel," said Nicholas.

Daniel looked at him.

"But you must not talk."

"Dan'l talk no more."

"Good," said Nicholas, and he was silent for a while.

Then later he said to him, "You must never—go back to *Wythewood*. Never."

He raised his eyelids to see if Daniel listened.

Daniel nodded. "Maussah."

The morning grew colder. When the tide turned, shortly before noon, a new wind rose to convoy it back up the channel. Daniel sat beside the smooth piece of driftwood, looking into Nicholas's face. He had taken off his coat and wrapped it round Nicholas's feet.

"Ol' tide's a-turnin', maussah."

A shudder passed over Nicholas.

"Bury me here—on the edge of the sea."

Then he closed his eyes and said nothing more. . . .

During the remainder of the day, except to feed the fire, the negro did not move. The gray wind spun round the little hill and snarled at the flames, throwing the blue smoke in gusts now off to sea, now over the body. On the crest of the knoll the brown sheaves of grass pointed their curved and shaken blades toward the forest. The mist was driven on. Once the wind whipped out a corner of Nicholas's cloak. Daniel tucked it about him again. There was no warmth in him.

Not until the colorless day at length began to fade did Daniel begin the preparations for burying his master. He worked slowly and with dignity, bareheaded in the scurrying wind. Now and then he paused and gazed for a time over the white-plumed breakers.

He dug the grave with a pointed stick, sharpened in the fire, loosening the soft sand and scooping it out with his hands. Dark fell. The fire, pale all day, became scarlet; its shadows returned from where they had been sleeping and danced about it. The white wall of sand glowed with a tinge of orange. Over the beach the negro's shadow ran black and gaunt down to the water. Occasionally he stopped to warm his wet hands at the blaze.

He fashioned the pit with great care—shaped it straight along the sides, laying it out so that when Nicholas raised his head he should look into the east, where the world begins. When the depth reached his thigh, he tramped the bottom flat.

From the fire he took a burning brand and lowered it into the grave. He laid a fire along the bottom and sat on his heels, watching it from above, the blaze shining on the ball of his forehead. The wind whistled shrill over the grass on the Head. The breakers crumbled up the strand as heavy as ice. The beach was black now, save for this burning gash and the light on the figure squatting over it. After a time he leaned into the pit and felt the sides. They were warm from the fire, with a thin crust over them.

He beat out the few coals that still burned in the bottom. Then he lifted Nicholas and lowered him into the warm grave. He drew his cloak over his face and began filling the sand back in, a handful at a time.

When he had finished, he returned slowly to the foot of the cliff and sat down, holding his knees in his arms and looking out across the mound into the empty blackness.

THE END

HANRAHAN, DRINKING MAN

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

SERGEANT BILL HANRAHAN was drunk in quarters. For three days and nights, except for staggering quick rushes in and out, he had been holed up in his small private room. Hanrahan was a lone drinker. And lone drinkers in the army are no more plentiful than blue moons, hens' teeth or well-liked post adjutants.

Hanrahan was a paper-work sergeant. San Anton' had sent him down from Texas to handle Cadet Corps records at Web Field, Florida. There were a hundred and one ways in which an old army man might help cadets; and in return there was at least one way in which big-pay cadets might repay a sergeant with a thirst.

Friday morning, which was the fourth day of Hanrahan's present heat, saw Sergeant Pop Murphy force his way into the rank-smelling shambles that, during sober periods, was an old-soldier's neat quarters. Murphy, like Hanrahan, was an old head. He was carrying even more army years than Hanrahan; for the day for Pop's formal retirement wasn't so far in the distance. With that in view, he was walking the straight and narrow. The days of black marks were put behind Pop Murphy; he had become a disapproving man.

Hanrahan, knowing that somebody had crashed his stronghold, shook his head and gazed through the fog.

"What you guys want?" he barked.

"Count 'em again!" Pop Murphy snapped. "From left to right, count 'em again. You drunken burrhead, you!"

"Oh, 'lo, Pop. You, eh? Say, listen, will you—"

"You listen, soldier," Pop snapped. "This is Friday, get that? Tomorrow's Saturday. Are you listening, you—"

"Sure, Pop. Say, listen, will you—"

"You act like a damned recruit. I say tomorrow's Saturday. Inspection, as usual, at ten of the a. m. Know what that means? . . . Shut up! . . . I've covered you for the past three days, but when the Old Man and his inspection party comes down the line in the morning, well, she'll be just too bad for you. This door opens, and if you're here, as is, it's one more bust for a lug that can't carry his liquor like a soldier. . . . Damn you, Hanrahan, you're the kind of a yaller-water ant that gives the army a bad name."

There and then, without a moment's warning, Hanrahan melted. He was hurt. He'd been called a recruit, to say nothing of a yaller-water ant, and by an old soldier. So he cried.

"Well, I'm going to sober up," he sobbed. " 'S truth, Pop. Anyway, who's drunk?" He staggered and fought to his feet. He drew both feet together, with a snap, tossed out his chest, and stood there near the bunk, clad only in a very hard-looking, once-lavender pair of pajamas. Hanrahan, being an exception, had pajamas in the army. "Look at this," he challenged. "Who's drunk! . . . Could report a company and post on a formal turnout. Could step up to the Old Man, salute and—" Hanrahan hit the bunk. Face down in the blanket, he sobbed.

Pop Murphy, insofar as he was acting-topkick of the Cadet Corps, was also Hanrahan's superior. Pop's real duty was to ring the guardhouse and ask them to send a carrying detail down for a wilted soldier. But old soldiers can't do that to old soldiers. Instead, they beef a lot. Threaten a heap. Yell like the devil, then see what can be done about bringing the fallen ram back to the pen.

Pop Murphy picked up the near side of Hanrahan's bunk; and Hanrahan rolled off the other. "Quit bawling, you ox," he snapped. "Get up and be a man. I've warned you, and now I'm on my way."

Hanrahan came off the floor mad, so mad that he decided to do something about it. He got to his feet and began up-ending and squeezing a queer assortment of long-dry bottles. Most of them had contained lemon and vanilla extract, extracted from the kitchen after the first few bottles of Florida moonshine had knocked Hanrahan off the company front.

Long experience, soaked as he was, told Hanrahan that he would have to get out of camp while he recovered. So he smashed a long line of those empty bottles to teach them a lesson, then crashed around the small room in search of his clothes. Without removing the suit of once-lavender pajamas, he pulled on a pair of old-issue long trousers. He humped his way into a tight blouse. Next, and with a mighty effort, he managed to kick his big feet into a pair of shoes. The lacing of those shoes was beyond him, so he tried to tuck the long strings into the tops, and called it a job. He found his barracks cap; and raked it at a regular go-to-hell angle over his right eye. Then, to be strictly regulation, he hard-knotted a black string tie around his neck—though right on his neck, not on any collar. He stood at attention, brushed two big open mitts down his front, studied the town-going get-up.

Now he was satisfied, except for the fact that the bottoms of the once-lavender pajamas hung far below the bottoms of the army pants. They looked like pale-purple spats on tan shoes. He knew that was wrong, but when he stooped

to make the correction, he did a somersault. While on the floor, swearing horribly, he rolled up the once-lavender bottoms; and by the time he'd rolled the right one out of sight, and started on the left, the right had unravelled again. And by the time he had regained his feet, the left once-lavender had also rolled down like a quick curtain.

Hanrahan was ready to go. Standing on his hind legs in full uniform, Hanrahan was a fine mess of a man. He had always been the first to count "One!" on any company front in which he stood. He was six-feet-eight, with all of two-sixty hard pounds of meat to hold up that giant frame. Drunk, he'd soak up liquor for days. Once sober, though, he'd dry it out under the hot Florida sun, on the long Florida road. Hanrahan could punish Hanrahan for his bad and for his good. Either way, he could take it.

The long barracks was deserted when Hanrahan stepped from his room. His head was back, his thin mouth drawn to a line; and he looked neither to left nor right as he hurried through the washroom, past the empty showers, and to the back door. He'd go that way, dodging the company street, and play safe.

Now those Web Field buildings, because of Florida climate, were all of four feet above the ground. It happened that the camp carpenters were replacing the flight of stairs at the back door chosen by Hanrahan. The old, weathered stairs had been ripped out; and the carpenters hadn't gone to the work of placing a warning barrier across the door. Hanrahan stepped through the door. He landed on the top of his head. It would have killed a sober man, broken his neck. It simply added toward the dignity of Hanrahan. "Damned high step!" he grumbled; and while he was down, he rolled the right once-lavender up under his pants.

HANRAHAN was on his way again, plus a bit of sand and weeds on his uniform. His path led past the back door of the cadets' mess hall kitchen. Cook Shinn and two of his K. P.'s were outside playing with a four-foot rattler, Florida brand. Shinn, being pretty good with anything like rattlers, was holding the snake. He had its neck pinched in his right hand, just behind the flat of the brutal head. The snake dangled at full length.

"Hi, Hanrahan," Cook Shinn chirped, just as the sergeant stepped abreast of where the three kitchen mechanics stood, "You and your passionate pink spats going to town? . . . Say, sergeant, how'd you like to sport this cane?" Shinn held forth the snake.

"Who you guys kidding?" Hanrahan barked; and as quick as a flash his right hand grabbed for the snake. He took it out of Shinn's hold with a snap. He had it around the thick of the trunk, nearly half down. Shinn and his K. P.'s, terror-stricken, scattered, shouting warnings. With his left hand, Hanrahan ran down the rest of the snake's length, got hold of the rattles, and snapped. Then he tossed what was left over the mess hall. But the snake had been even quicker. There were two red spots on the heel of Hanrahan's right hand as he pushed on toward the camp garage.

"Wait a minute, Hanrahan," Shinn yelled. "You've been snake bit. . . . Listen, Hanrahan."

Hanrahan turned. "Say, you damned food-destroyer!" he shouted. "If I come back, I'll take you by the seat of the pants and snap your neck too. Snake bit! Snake bit! I'd like to see the cock-eyed rattler that—Hey, hey you!"

Hanrahan was making tracks now. A light truck had just swung out through the garage door. As it turned the next corner, toward the main company street, the driver of the truck had to slow down, to avoid running over the giant who was

trying to leap aboard. Hanrahan, holding on and dragging from the off-side running board, now scrambled to the high front seat. He cussed more than a little, lifted his massive kick to the dash, rolled the right once-lavender pajama leg, then the left one, and growled, "Why didn't you stop, eh?"

By that time the truck had reached the main company street. Instead of turning right, toward the main gate and town, it carried on straight ahead toward the active flying space.

"Hey, Cracker, I'm going to town," Hanrahan said.

"Not on this wagon, you-all ain't," said the young man at the wheel.

Hanrahan swore some more. But just as the truck reached the field-side hangar road, Hanrahan spied the C. O.'s own private car coming along. The corporal driving that official olive-drab touring car had to slow up, almost stop, to give the turning truck the right of way. Hanrahan scrambled down, and took another fall. He was up like a flash. And before the official-car corporal knew what was happening, Hanrahan had climbed the side door and was plunked down beside him. Again the shoes came to the dash. Again the right once-lavender pajama leg was rolled. Then while he was rolling the left, the right one unrolled again. He grunted in disgust.

"You going to town, Corporal?" Hanrahan asked.

"Yeh. But you ain't," said the driver.

"Where's the C. O.?" Hanrahan wanted to know. "How come you're empty?"

"The Old Man and Captain Merritt are in the air doing their month's pay hop. I'm headed for town on an errand for the C. O. But that doesn't do you any good, soldier."

"So you tell!" growled Hanrahan. "You're talking to a first-class sergeant, corporal. Don't forget that."

"Okey, first-class," said the corporal, "but I can't afford to take a bust for sneaking a camp drunk through the main gate. So I'll stop at the guard house and ask the O. D. if it's jake with him."

"Do that—do that, and I'll lay you so wide open . . ."

They were nearing Hangar No. 1, at the north end of the field. The corporal slowed down for a right turn. He said, "Here's where we go over past the guard house. What will it be? I ain't kidding."

Hanrahan spied a plane warming up out on the deadline before Hangar 1. He started to climb out. The corporal squealed the car to a quick stop. Hanrahan rolled into the ditch. He stumbled up and out.

Crossing the road, getting back his dignity again, Sergeant Hanrahan once more undertook the task of policing his appearance. He dusted his uniform. Then, still hurrying, he tried to roll his right once-lavender pajama leg, then his left; and becoming angry with them both, he tried to roll them at the same time and wound up, head down, in the ditch on the west side of the hangar road.

There was just one ship on the deadline. In that ship, with his head down listening to the revving motor, was Captain Mosher. The captain was officer in charge of Cadet Corps. That is, he was big Hanrahan's C. O. And Captain Mosher had been doing his best trying to avoid seeing Hanrahan for the past few days. Captain Mosher was a good top man. He didn't care to know, officially, anything about this Hanrahan spree. He preferred to wait until the hour when he could call a sober Hanrahan in for a bit of a bawling-out. That had always been Captain Mosher's policy; and, hence, the hand of no Web Field enlisted man or cadet was against him. That's all any officer can attain.

Sergeant King and Corporal Page were standing on the far side of the captain's ship, listening to the motor.

Just as the captain was about to say something to King over the right side of the cockpit, Hanrahan thrust his head

in from the left. The captain held his words. A queer expression crossed his face. "What," he said, "in the devil are we burning in this motor—sheep dip? . . . What're you laughing at, sergeant?"

Sergeant King got his mouth closer to the captain's right ear and said—"Eyes left, sir. Company's come."

Captain Mosher turned and looked into the hard-looking mask that was Hanrahan's face. Here was one man upon whom Mosher—acting officially—should put the screws. Here was a tough detail for the captain.

Hanrahan stiffened and saluted.

"What is it, sergeant?" asked Mosher.

"I'm a little bit under the weather, sir. . . . My stomach, I guess. . . . I was wondering if the captain would fly me to town . . . any small town—Nocatee, Ft. Ogden or Punta Gorda—and I'll get myself fixed up. . . . I don't like the medics on this field, and—"

"I understand, sergeant," the captain cut in. He looked far down the line; and as far as he could tell, they had no audience. "Get in, sergeant," he added. To Sergeant King—"Give him a leg-up. Let's hurry. I'll hop him over the fence. Be sure of his safety-belt."

Sergeant King and Page came around the ship. Together they boosted big Hanrahan into the small front cockpit. "That's the place for him," the captain said. "His safety-belt's okey, eh?" I want him where I can keep an eye on him. . . . Listen, sergeant,"—this to Hanrahan, with the captain standing to talk in the big one's ear—"be sure you keep clear of those controls. Don't get your feet on the rudder-bar. And don't put your mitts on the stick. . . . And watch your left elbow on that throttle. . . . Get it?"

"All jake, sir," yelled Hanrahan. "I'm an old flyer myself. I know all about it, sir. 'S all jake."—This was in spite of the fact that Web Field had never before seen Hanrahan near a ship. Few of those old-branch sergeants cared much for these new mounts of air. However, the captain had warned him; and it was always well to do that, in a dual-control ship, even with a perfectly sober greenhorn aboard.

CORPORAL PAGE pulled the chock-blocks. Captain Mosher hit the old bus on the tail with full gun and they were under way. The towering Hanrahan's head and shoulders, still stiff as a ram, stuck up above the pit's windshield; and the blast of the slipstream lashed his mop of hair across his face. That didn't bother him at all. He was on his dignity, looking straight ahead, as solemn as an owl.

As soon as they were a few hundred feet off the ground, and nosed into the south, Captain Mosher could see their point of landing, Punta Gorda. It was a town about twenty-three miles from Web, down at the head of small Charlotte Harbor, with the Gulf just beyond. Punta Gorda is on the Arcadia-Fort Myers state highway. There'd be plenty of Web Field men down there after dark, for it was an out-and-out enlisted man's town. The enlisted prowlers could take care of Hanrahan when and where they found him. Mosher would see to it, upon returning from this flight, that a certain few good men be warned to scout out the big one.

The miles went aft, rapidly, for twenty-three is no great mileage for a ship on the wing. Captain Mosher had a bit of an idea on the way south. Science had been saying that a hard and long plane dive will cure deafness. Moreover, Mosher knew that just an ordinary bit of air time would work wonders for a hangover. He knew that from his own experience. And it was with something like a long dive in view that the captain took on more altitude than was really needed for such a short flight across good Florida country.

When ten minutes and about fifteen

miles of the southward course had been covered, the ship was at 5000 feet. Captain Mosher levelled off and throttled down to cruising speed. Then he half stood and took a look at Hanrahan's safety-belt. He found the big, wild-eyed solemn owl securely fastened. That type of now-obsolete training ship was never built for what you'd call a hard dive. The brave had been known to send them down through about fifteen hundred feet of straight fall without dire results. But, for a sober pilot, a thousand and a half feet of elevator drop, with the cables cut, is plenty.

Full gun to the motor, the stick ahead to the instrument-board, and the plane started down. The old bus tightened right to the business. She shimmied and shook. Mosher put both hands on the stick, and held it. A thousand feet slipped off the altimeter. The stout old wings curved up and back. You could take a handful of slack in any one of her eight landing wires. A drift-wire to the nose snapped. A plume of mixed exhaust smoke and radiator water streaked back. And still Captain Mosher stood on that rudder-bar and watched the ground come up. Fifteen hundred feet had gone like nothing at all, and in nothing flat. That was enough. It was plenty. So the captain pulled back the throttle and began to ease her out. She came out all in one piece. Mosher told himself that he would never try that again. It cured him of such foolishness, regardless of the effect on Hanrahan.

Hanrahan, as near as Mosher could tell, was entirely unaffected. But to make sure, the captain reached ahead, after throttling low, and rapped the big one on the shoulder. Hanrahan gave a start, then sat quiet again. He'd dozed through that fall. It didn't seem possible. Captain Mosher rapped again. Hanrahan, half turning, blinked his bleary eyes questioningly. The captain, after waking such a passenger, must cover his mistake some way. So he half stood again, dropped the nose just a bit to hold safe glide, and yelled, pointing ahead:

"There's Punta, sergeant. . . . Punta Gorda! . . . Down there—Punta Gorda! . . . See it?"

Hanrahan's tight mouth gave way to a dignified "Oh!" and he raised a knowing hand. Then he looked over the wrong side of the ship. Then aft. Then, finally, ahead and down. He stared for a long, long time. Meanwhile, Captain Mosher resumed flying, taking notice that he was cruising at 3000 elevation.

Hanrahan located Punta. He waved again and pointed a dopey finger in that general direction. Then, being a good soldier, he thought to police his appearance before going aground. He reached around and captured the free ends of the hard-knotted black tie, pulling them from where they'd been waving aft in the slipstream. Next, he rubbed his fingers across his tongue, then began to slick down his mop of hair with that big right mitt. Captain Mosher had to laugh at that vain try.

With the hair nicely slicked, Hanrahan brought up his left hand, plus his barracks cap. He was going to put that on. He did. And the blast of the slipstream whisked it off his head. The men who do all the heavy figuring in the aeronautical laboratories will tell you that the sweep of the slipstream's blast is twenty-five per cent. faster than the speed of the ship. The barracks cap sailed aft on a wind that was doing something like 115 miles per hour.

The barracks cap, with its heavy and thick leather visor, whaled itself slambang across the bridge of Captain Mosher's nose. His goggles shattered. Being crash-wise, instinct had warned him to close his eyes the jiffy he'd seen Hanrahan place the cap. Opening those eyes, he found himself looking through blood. Mosher had that sick and sinking feeling, that feeling that comes with a hard blow on the bridge of the nose.

The heat of the motor, plus the fumes of gas, only added to the sickness. Mosher found himself weak on the controls; and he fought hard to remain in the picture. But the picture was going black!

Hanrahan, with little Punta Gorda so nearly won, wasn't idle. Not for a second. He reached around, a few times, trying to locate the barracks cap that didn't seem to be on his head. Failing to find it, he gave up the quest. But his uniform must be smoothed, and all buttons buttoned. He saw to that.

Then his eyes, sweeping down and ahead, came to rest on the once-lavender pajamas that again hung over his unlaced shoes like pale-purple spats. Instinct told him that was wrong. It wasn't regulation. He tried to reach down. He hit his head on the hard edge of the cowl. He reached and pawed some more. But a normal-sized man couldn't stoop and reach his feet in that type of cockpit. As for a man of the Hanrahan size —he couldn't do it if he were a contortionist. But the pajama legs had to be rolled out of sight; and Hanrahan was the man to take care of that. Hadn't he rolled them before? He surely had.

Hanrahan, still scrambling, slammed back in his seat, pulled the right leg up, reached with his right hand, and captured the foot. But a man must brace his left leg if he is to hold that right in place long enough to roll a pajama cuff so that it will stay rolled. So Hanrahan braced his left foot, solidly, on the rudder-bar. Then, to make the job easier, Hanrahan rested his right foot on the top of the joystick itself, pressing that all-important control clear ahead to the instrument-board. His third lunging move, also to make it easier to get at the pajama leg, was to jam his stout left forearm hard against the ship's top left longeron, right up under the cowling. Doing that, his forearm brushed the throttle back—killing off the motor's pull—and holding it retarded. Three quick moves. As perfect a triumvirate of Death as could be imagined.

By then the ship's nose was hard down; and Captain Mosher's faltering senses told him as much. His sapped strength wasn't up to the job of pushing the throttle ahead, not against the beef of Hanrahan's stout left arm. He reached for the stick that had been so suddenly jerked from his right grasp. The joystick, braced by Hanrahan's leg, was as firmly set as any strut or spar in the craft. As for the rudder—that most important of all three controls—Mosher couldn't kick it out of its hard-left set. His returning senses told him that his front-seat passenger had fallen asleep, slumping on all controls at once.

With the ship doing a crazy sideslip dive, Mosher pulled himself to a standing position. Then, still through the bloody haze of uncertain eyes, he saw what he saw. He yelled. Hanrahan, still busy with the right cuff of the pajamas, gave no heed. The captain thumped lustily on the big one's head; and still there was no useful response. That couldn't go on; and the captain didn't have to tell himself that for a second time. He knew that seconds were things that counted now.

Already a full thousand feet of life-giving altitude had been sluffed off like nothing at all. What's more, the plane wasn't doing a normal, natural, speed-controlled spin. Instead it was in a fast, sideslipping, nose-low drop; and that speed was taking on the ever-increasing momentum that has to do with the acceleration of freely-falling bodies. It was just the simple old formula that Mosher had learned back in his high-school days; and he knew that the answer to this falling mass, multiplied into the velocity thereof, was going to result in an awful smear on the Florida landscape, unless he was able to end the parade at once.

Air Corps' regulations called for a hand-pump type fire-extinguisher in each cockpit of every plane. Those ex-

tinguishers in training ships had made good for more than one instructor. If a student "froze" the controls, one quick blow on the head with an extinguisher took the heavy-handed student's mind off flying for the time being. Mosher, still standing, reached under the cockpit's cowl and pulled the extinguisher from its clip frame. With that bludgeon ready for action, the captain, yelling, gave Hanrahan one more chance to cooperate. Hanrahan did not hear.

CAPTAIN MOSHER, gripping a center-section strut with his left hand to steady his stance, cracked down on Hanrahan's head. The sergeant straightened, stared, shook his head. Mosher knew what to expect then—fight, perhaps. A wild, D. T. guy amuck in the air. So the captain struck Hanrahan for keeps.

Hanrahan wilted, oozing his face forward in such a manner as to knock the ignition switch to "off." The propeller continued to laze its revs only because the rush of wind, caused by the hard dive, kept it turning.

There was work to be done. Captain Mosher dropped the extinguisher. He grabbed a handful of Hanrahan's hair and jerked him back to an upright position. He scrambled headfirst over Hanrahan's right shoulder. He put a hand to the instrument-board and snapped the switch to "on." He jerked the good left forearm of the sleeper from where it held the throttle fouled. Ahead went the throttle. Br-r-r-r-u-p! went the motor; and the power was back on the ship's nose. But power wasn't all that was needed. The stick and rudder were still in chancery. And was the ship diving by then!

Mosher couldn't figure just what was holding the wings on the old bus. He knew that more than two thousand feet of fall had been unravelled behind his tail; and he also knew that less than a thousand feet stood before him.

He yanked Hanrahan's left foot off the rudder-bar. But Hanrahan, upon being knocked out, had dropped his right foot from the joystick. The foot and shin had slid down between the stick and the seat. That meant that the control was still jammed ahead to the instrument-board. And, with a sinking heart, Captain Mosher told himself that all the king's strong-arm men couldn't pull that stout leg free without first lifting the mighty hulk of Hanrahan entirely free of his seat. The stunt was out of the question.

There was a chance in a few hundred that the bus might be lifted out of the dive solely by use of power. At best, it was going to be a desperate try; but what was one more desperate try after what had already happened? Just as he was pulling himself back out of the crowded cockpit, the captain caught a peek at the waters of upper Charlotte Harbor. Water! That was the stuff for his landing, if he could manage to lift the nose a little and win those waters. If he could do that, he might manage to put her down for a splashing, crash landing. Mosher didn't want to have Hanrahan strapped to a seat when the moment of ducking should arrive. So, as a last move before quitting the cockpit, he pulled the safety of Hanrahan's belt; and the big one still sat erect through weight of beef alone.

The motor was yelling at full gun. Mosher read eight hundred feet on his altimeter as he dropped back to his own seat. He sensed that the ship was showing signs of bringing its bow out of the nearly-straight dive. But eight hundred feet wasn't enough room. Something more had to be done. Mosher had the answer—if he could do it. The first flash of thought told him that he couldn't. But he didn't wait to argue with himself.

He fought his way back to a standing position. He turned and dug his fingers

through the linen of the ship's turtleback, just aft his own pit. Then, still headfirst, he pulled himself—and his own good one hundred eighty-five pounds of man—out onto that tail. And out and out a few more handholds, with his heels kicking hold-on holes of their own. At first he looked only into sky, out there over the tail. Then he suddenly got a peek at Florida, 'way behind him. Turning for a second and looking out front, he saw the howling bow come up out of small Punta Gorda and break the horizon. And when that thing happened the good ship Hardship was close enough to vegetation to put the odor of cypress in Mosher's nose.

After that, just about anything was possible for Captain Mosher. He pushed his feet back toward the cockpit. The nose of the ship was zooming above the far Gulf horizon by then. He pushed some more. Finally he put his feet back on the cushion of his seat. However, if he was to resume his place at the controls, with that joystick full ahead, there was more than an even chance that the motor, though she roared at full gun, couldn't hold the ship's nose out of another dive. But Punta Gorda was streaking past; and Charlotte Harbor was below. Give him another brief minute or so, then Mosher would be all set to put her down to a quick landing on the water. The trim of the ship, that is laterally, was as close to perfect as the good Web Field riggers could make it. So, even with the pilot off the controls, the bus took care of its own flying.

Captain Mosher put his weight deep enough in that cockpit to pull the ship down out of its climb. Motor still howling, the nose dropped back to the horizon, and a little lower. Then, standing and sitting, now and then toeing the rudder-bar, the captain jockeyed for all the thing was worth. He managed to steal a peek at the waters ahead. There, about two miles down the harbor, off toward Pine Island, was a small fishing skiff of some sort. There were two in the boat; and that was the only piece of water craft standing offshore in that whole vicinity.

Mosher decided to put her down as close to that skiff as was humanly possible.

He took one last glance at Hanrahan. Not a sign of motion there. He then put his weight a few feet forward. Lower went the nose. Up came the water. Only a scant fifty feet then stood between his wheels and the wet landing field. Lower he put her, and lower. Now, with the skiff hardly half a mile out front—and with two wild men pulling oars like the very devil, getting out from under—Captain Mosher got set.

The ship was less than ten feet in the air. So he put a toe clear to the instrument-board and kicked off the switch. Then, with the last few seconds of play, he slid deep in his seat.

The crash came. It came, of course, with the depressed elevators sending that nose down hard. The lower wings cut the water, and knifed their way right under. The wide upper wings put up a resistance to the general diving plunge of the fuselage; and, putting up that resistance, the upper wings trimmed off the ship. Trimming off, those wings and their attached center-section slithered aft along the rocket-like fuselage. The center-section, in passing, uncovered Hanrahan's cockpit completely, then rapped Captain Mosher on the head. After that, the whole works, top wings and all, went under water.

Hanrahan, with the never-failing luck of a drunk, floated to the top. Then the cold water brought him to, and he came to fighting. The men in the boat, two colored fishermen, overcame their first fright and pulled toward where there had been one big splash. With the old brain clearing, Hanrahan crawled a few expert strokes and swung an arm over the low gunwale of the skiff.

"What'n hell happened?" Hanrahan

was yelling. "Hey, you guys, what'n hell came off here? Eh, speak up!"

"Y'all was aridin' in yon airyplane," one of the fisherman made known. "She done gone yon."

"Eh?" Hanrahan barked. "Yon? What d'ya mean—yon?"

They stood and pointed over there and down. "Y'all dives un'er right chere, white man."

SOMETHING told Hanrahan that he must have been up in a ship. And these colored boys said the ship was down there. That being the case, there must be another man—a pilot—down there too. Hanrahan was Hanrahan then—something in keeping with that six-foot-eight, two-sixty-pounds of man that had filled a regulation uniform as No. 1 man on so many regular-army company fronts.

Hanrahan sounded, getting under the water like a whale with a misplaced harpoon in his stern. He reached down to find his feet on a wing. Holding to that, he made his way toward where he guessed the fuselage must be. It was there. He found a man in the rear pit. But the man in the rear pit, very still, hardly moving, was pinned under the upper wing's center-section. Hanrahan, planting his feet on top of the cowl, put that two-sixty pounds of beef into the lift. Any poundage less than two-sixty wouldn't have filled the bill; but the crashed-back center-section came, giving clear way to the man below. And by then Hanrahan had to turn loose of that detail. Half unconscious, he paddled his drowning way back to the surface.

Then he was gone under again.

How Hanrahan ever managed to work is beyond all understanding. But he did it. The captain came free. And more than half drowned this time, blue in the face, Hanrahan fought his way back to the surface, Captain Mosher in hand. Holding to two nearly-dead men, one of the colored fishermen hung overside. The other rowed for the beach.

Carrying the captain, half dragging Hanrahan, the natives started through a mile of palmetto barren. The Fort Myers road lay beyond that palmetto. There were cars along on the highway, with a hospital at the Fort Myers end of the highway.

It was after sundown when the two Web Field men reached beds in that hospital.

About nine o'clock that same night, being conscious again, the captain looked over to the next bed where Hanrahan tossed and turned. "How're you cutting it, soldier?" he asked. "No can sleep, eh?"

"Hell, sir," said Hanrahan. "I should be Scotch-hobbled. One first-class, drunken fool is what I am to get you in this mess."

"Never mind the self praise," Captain Mosher said. "She's been done—so let it go at that." He turned his head on the pillow. "However, sergeant, there's an accident report to be made out, as soon as I get away from this place. What's more, the Old Man or his adjutant might drop in tonight or in the morning. How in the devil can I account for the presence of an airplane at the bottom of Charlotte Harbor? We can't tell them that you were full of snake juice. They'd ride that, if I do."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Captain," offered Hanrahan. "You had a right to give me a hop. I'll admit that I purposely wrecked the ship by freezing the controls. That'll listen all right, 'cause you or no other Web Field man could take the controls away from a bird of my size. That should put you in the clear. Or you just say I went bugs."

"Hell!" said the captain. "Let me figure—say, what's wrong with you Hanrahan? You sick?—pain? Eh?"

Hanrahan held up a bandaged right mitt. He said, "The nurse told me, just before you woke up, that I got me a

dose of poison in this right flipper, somewheres along the line of march. It's giving me the devil, up here in the armpit. . . . And my head, too. . . . Sweating like old Billy H. Hell right now. . . . Boy! am I sick. . . . Do you guess a water-moccasion took a chaw at me while we were in that water?"

"That right hand," said the captain —"that right had two red spots on it when we were in the air. I remember seeing them when you tried to slick your hair down."

"I got it now," said Hanrahan, with a long drag on memory. "Back in camp, when I was on my way out to your ship, there was some of the gang, behind the barracks, or the garage—no, behind the mess hall. That's it, some of the K. P.'s, I think. And they had a snake. It must of been that rattler bit me. . . . Yep, they were stringing me. I kind of remember now. . . . Hell!"—and this with wild-eyed fright—"I'm rattlesnake bit!"

"Swell!" cheered Captain Mosher, snapping to a sitting position. "That puts us in the clear, sergeant. Man! you were bitten by a rattlesnake. That snake bit you through the malicious carelessness of enlisted men on an army post. That makes it a wound in line of duty. All right. Being an enlisted man, it isn't necessary that you take treatment from army doctors. Knowing that you were in a tough spot, you hurried to me, your company commander. Well"—he paused for a long breath—"with the time element so important, I took it upon myself to fly you directly to the nearest first-class hospital. That's this Fort Myers hospital. We got under way, heading directly south. Over Punta Gorda you fell forward freezing all controls, owing to the fact that you were full of snake juice—which is the truth. Well, we crashed in the harbor. Then, displaying bravery far beyond the usual call of duty, you rescued me, your commanding officer, from death. . . . You know, sergeant, there's nothing wrong with that story."

"But hell, sir," Hanrahan said, with fear in his very soul, "a rattler bit me."

"If it did," laughed Mosher, recalling the liquor Hanrahan had carried, "you must have killed it."

"I kinda remember I did, sir," said the big one.

THE CAMP-FIRE

The meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers.

A FINE bright blaze crackles this time in the Camp-Fire. Thousands of comrades who have been in the circle year in and year out will feel the warm and cheerful glow on their faces. We have a message from one of the few great editors—the man who conducted our magazine with so much ability and honest enthusiasm that readers gave him a truly remarkable response of loyalty and friendliness. No large group of readers is so loyal as the older guard of *Adventure*. They are an unusual army of well-read and friendly men, and at their head still marches the talented comrade who sends us this greeting:

Carmel, N. Y.

Dear Comrades of the Camp-Fire:—Is there room around the Fire for one of its old-timers? No adventures to tell about, but as I was the fellow who gathered the first wood and struck the first spark for this Camp-Fire of ours, maybe there's still a place for me to sit and listen to the others after I've given an account of myself.

I admit it: I've not been coming to the meetings. To make a long story short, when I resigned as editor of our magazine, I was more glad than sorry to do so. Partly because I was going to a better paying job but chiefly because it had become more and more plain to me that the new ownership (at that time) was set upon making changes in the magazine that seemed to me to doom it to go down hill. They even spoke of abolishing Camp-Fire and Ask Adventure as well as all other departments. After working hard for seventeen years to build up the magazine I naturally didn't want to stay and see it crumble away. Still less did I want to be held responsible by the readers for things I did not approve and could not prevent.

Well, our magazine did what I had foreseen—went down hill. Many a one of you has written me bemoaning that

fact. A number of editors tried their hands; I do not think any editor could have made a success of the program and under the limitations laid down from above. Personally, I stopped reading the magazine. Camp-Fire at times seemed a mere travesty of what it had once been; I missed the old spirit among you, despite the faithful who did their best to keep things as they had been.

One day last summer, on one of my infrequent trips from the country, I stopped in to see Joe Cox of our old staff, having learned he'd returned to the magazine after its purchase by Popular Publications. I met the present editor and we went to lunch. We talked. Then we talked more frankly, and for a long time. About nothing except the magazine and Camp-Fire.

On another visit we talked again, and this time one of the publishers sat in on our informal session.

And so I've come back to Camp-Fire. No, I have no connection with the magazine in any way except as a reader. I've come back merely as one of the Camp-Fire gang. Because, for the first time since some seven years ago, our magazine has an ownership and an editor who really understand it as we understand it and whose aim is to make it all that we used to find it. As I know from experience, it takes time to build up what we had, for what we had was not just printed words on pages but a spirit of comradeship and understanding that grew up among us. But now we're not only on our way, but picking up speed.

Some of you never deserted the Fire, so it could not die out entirely. Now we have an editor who is really one of us and, back of him, a house that also understands. It looks to me as if the good old times were coming back again.

Apparently it looks the same way to the rest of you, for the circulation has begun to go up steadily. Even during the summer months, dull ones for magazines, it was going up.

And very glad I am to be "home" once more. I've been in touch with quite a few of you, both readers and members of our writers' brigade, and hearing occasionally from others, but it's good to be able to shake hands with all my old friends again and to meet the new comrades. Most of us have traveled a long and pleasant road together; there are many memories and old ties and there is good comradeship among us. Our Camp-Fire is now twenty-two years old. Here's to its next, and better, twenty-two years.

—Arthur S. Hoffman.

FROM Edwin Chancellor Payne of Washington, D. C., comes this most interesting account of passenger pigeons (in response to a recent discussion in *Ask Adventure*) with a possible and highly dramatic explanation of their complete disappearance:—

I have been a close and interested reader of your *Adventure* since I found the first copy of it on a newsstand years ago. The passenger pigeon flight, ending in their final entire disappearance many years ago, has been more or less inaccurately dealt with.

What I write now is true and exact in every word and detail. I have been a hunter and student of wild life ever since I was ten years old. A gentleman in Alabama, though telling a good story, is "all wet." He calls the bird in question "Carrier Pigeon." Wrong!

He says, "They were of a size between that of a robin and a dove." Wrong again!

This pigeon was about the size (slightly larger if anything) of the ordinary tame pigeon, carrier or otherwise. The tail was much longer, wings spread slightly greater, crop and throat muscles, etc., capable of great expansion as they could swallow with ease the largest acorn that grows, so far as I know (the chestnut oak acorn.) I make these comparisons knowing well the size of the robin, and also the Alabama dove.

Now for the story.

I was born, to quote my old colored mammy, "Crazy 'bout huntin' and fishin'." Our Virginian home in the southeastern portion of Prince William County, seven miles west of the Potomac River, had been a large slavery time plantation, of course reverting

to "old fields," consequent upon the loss of slaves, other labor and poverty following the Civil War. These old fields had grown up in sassafras bushes, and every September they had their unvarying crop of rich berries. My first recollection is hearing the guns of the hunters "pigeon shooting" in the fall, when they always came in great numbers to feed on these berries, and every kid in the neighborhood, white and black, had his or her job "pickin' pidgins" all day long.

I must have been about twelve years old the year of "The Big Flight." I can see it in my mind's eye at this moment as plain as if I were looking at it. It was about a mile north of our house, which stood on a high hill, to a big woods on that side and the same distance on the south to another big body of woods. The view for five miles east was excellent over another big forest; to the west there was half a mile of good view. Every morning a few minutes before the actual rising of the sun to the east a long low black cloud would come in sight to the east, reaching as far as one could see to north and south and it travelled west, finally beginning to pass over the old home.

This was The Flight.

My father was a very poor shot and did not care for hunting, but he would take his double-barrel muzzle loader, get out in front of the house near the barn and shoot a few times up into the flock, thus killing as many as my mother would let him for our table. This cloud of pigeons would pass without a break, for about an hour and a half; then would begin to grow scattering and finally The Flight would have passed.

A little before sun down in the evening they would begin to pour into the surrounding woods to roost.

North of the house there was a body of big pines thickly covering a plot of land containing exactly seventy-two acres. No use to try to say how many poured in there to roost. Millions, I guess. As they filled up the trees, limbs would begin to break off, (but none of them "six inches through.") and those above would thrash and fall down on those beneath, killing and crippling hundreds of them, an uncountable number anyway.

Everybody had their flock of wild hogs then, as there was no stock law in Virginia, and they ranged eleven months of the year "pine-rooting," and later fattening on the abundant mass of acorns and chestnuts (that whole country was virgin forest then, except for the "Old Fields.")

The hogs would gather to one of these pigeon roosts from everywhere and eat these dead and cripple ones as long as they could find one. I have watched them at it for hours. When morning came it was the case of "The Flight" again, always *west*. This was not the only roosting ground that I speak of here, I knew and still know of hundreds of others as large, or larger. A man could buy an army musket then, or a thousand of them, for twenty-five cents apiece. With few exceptions there were no other sort of guns owned by poor people, and said "ownership" was universal. Many of this class cleaned and salted up barrels of pigeons and during the winter months they would soak the salt out of them, hang them up and smoke them just as they did their "hawg" meat. I have eaten them many times and though very dark meat, they were good. Can't recall now that I ever saw one that was not fat. The chestnut oak acorn was about the exact size and nearly the shape of the Civil War conical musket bullet. I have seen these pigeons strip a big tree of them, swallowing them with ease in a minute or two. Another favorite food of theirs was dogwood, and gum berries.

After the crop of acorns and berries were on the ground following the early frosts, The Flight still continuing, though not in solid formation, still in tremendous flocks, the pigeons fed on this stuff on the ground.

To give you an idea how this was, I will describe one time that I recall perfectly. I was passing along a path through a large body of woods about three miles from my home, and the pigeons began to "ground" on the northern edge of it. I could hear them half a mile away. Dogwood bushes were thick in these woods, and the berries were on the ground. In a very short time a solid wave of pigeons came in sight, their front almost as well aligned as a regiment of soldiers. It looked like nothing so much as a big blue wave, four or five feet high, rolling through the forest.

Soon I was in the middle of that wave. They paid scarcely any attention to me, many of them striking me as they passed. Of course they did no scratching, but the motion of so many wings had every loose bit of leaf and trash in a twirl, and the air was heavy with the smell of the birds. If you will go into any large pigeon house you will know what I mean by this "smell." Soon they passed on, the blue wave roaring on through the woods and in their wake many dead and crippled ones, and the closest search would not reveal one seed or berry or acorn. As the weather grew colder they finally and entirely disappeared. The Flight was over.

Now for the final disposition of this Flight, as I got it in later years from the only man (an honorable and intelligent old gentleman) I have ever talked to, who knew what he was talking about and told the truth, I firmly believe.

At the age of twenty I entered a big railroad machine shop at Roanoke, Virginia, to learn the blacksmith trade. My blacksmith was an old ex-sea captain, James Wilson ("Uncle Jimmy"), an Englishman of advanced years, who had, to quote him, "Followed the sea for twenty-two years from cabin boy to master." He had sailed around The Horn several times and had a store of

stories of his travels, that to me was rich indeed. He spent many of his evenings and Sundays at my (then) home and he had his old "log books," diaries, etc., which he would refer to and show me his entries as he told me his stories.

One evening after his pipe was going well, he suddenly asked me, "Ned, did you ever know anything about the pigeons and what become of them?" I remember I told him that they went west and had never come back as far as I knew, and I had only seen a few after The Flight and upon examination invariably found they had been at some time or other crippled. I now repeat his exact words.

"We were coming from California in 18—, in the ship ———, and in longitude — and latitude —, we began to sail past many dead birds floating on the sea. After a while they commenced dropping occasionally on the ship and lighted on the rigging. We saw more and more dead on the water and ahead we could see thousands of them on all sides and as the number of them became larger in our sight, we could see them falling continually, falling out of The Flight into the ocean. As we got into the thick of it they swarmed on the ship, both dead and living ones would fall and light as the case might be. At one time we feared that the weight of them would do serious damage to the ship, but the crew kept the deck clean and we put men in the rigging to clear them out of there. They fair smothered us, and, sir, we sailed I don't know how many miles for hours through these dead birds floating on the water.

"They were that poor and starved that we never found one that we thought fit to eat. That sir, was the end of your American pigeon. Some may have gotten across, I don't know, California is a big country, and they may be there yet. I have never been back, and I don't know. Other ships had the same experience we did, no doubt. I have talked to many other sailors about it in my time and they knew what I do, but they are all gone and if records were kept the makers of them no doubt, like these pigeons, have fallen in their Flight like most men do when they go down to the sea in ships."

There was no more truthful man than Uncle Jimmy, a fine old gentleman and a man of his word; and not many years later, the great Reaper, Age, ended his Flight. Thus does our Creator remedy over-population, whether it be bird, animal or man, and "moves in mighty mysterious ways, His miracles to perform." The pigeons felt the urge for the Flight, were fattened and prepared for the end, as with man, the Flight as a remedy, for his over-population is adjusted and ended by flood, famine, pestilence and war.

WELL, an editor does have his problems.

U. S. Customs Service,
San Francisco, Calif.

Your contributors are generally so accurate in their local color in regional stories, that it is painful to read in "The Banyan Tree," by S. H. Small, the use of what appears to be Cantonese dialect in a village near the Great Wall where Mandarin is used exclusively.

There are more of your readers than you suspect who have knowledge of Chinese dialects, and for your author to put grotesque words in the mouth of his characters as in this case is to be deplored.

Yours truly,

V. C. Clowe,
Formerly Chinese Interpreter,
U. S. Consular Service, China.

SOME recent issues of *Adventure* have been full of typographical errors. Too often some gem of misplaced, added, or dropped letters has sparkled in the middle of an otherwise perfectly composed page.

Printers are a human lot, and being human, they make mistakes. The ones I have known are good fellows, who now and then must work in a rush, who have bills, who have sick kids, who have cosigned the wrong man's note, who have mortgage troubles, who've had words with wives the evening before, who have colds—the list could be extended a long way even as with you and me.

And maybe it seems unreasonable to ask these printers and proof-readers to catch and correct all editorial mistakes and not make a single one of their own.

But such is a printer's hard lot, and such is a proof-reader's, too. And though probably no man should raise his son in these damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't professions, nevertheless, if there is a single typographical error in this issue, I hope you will write a letter about it.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information about all the world

CONCERNING infra-red photography of sub-cutaneous blood-vessels.

Request:—Can one detect, by infra-red photography, that a nose has been straightened by plastic surgery? I want to use this in a mystery story to disclose the criminal's identity. Is it possible?

—DUDLEY BROOKS, Milwaukee, Wisc.

Reply by Mr. Paul Anderson:—I'm afraid your notion of using infra-red photography to detect plastic surgery on a criminal's nose is hardly practical. In the first place, the infra-red rays have very little penetration in human tissue—a fraction of a millimeter—so any infra-red photography would be entirely superficial. In the next place, plastic surgery is done inside the nose, so the scar would be inside, and your criminal might not like to have the interior of his proboscis photographed. And finally, there is no definite plan or layout in the capillaries, as there is in the major blood-vessels, so the effect of an operation would not be apparent in any kind of photography unless done within a month or less, before the clots have been absorbed and the capillaries have rearranged themselves. Of course, if a dished or snub nose had been built up by subcutaneous injections of paraffin, an X-ray photograph would show it up very readily.

If you want to use infra-red photography, why not have it detect the criminal in the act of opening the safe, stabbing his victim, or what not? Illuminate your room with several 1000-watt Mazdas covered by black paper, hypersensitize your plates with ammonia, focus on the safe by means of a bolometer, and when the trap is all set, attract your criminal's attention by a slight noise, to hold him motionless for the second or so required for the exposure, which exposure could be made by means of an electro-magnetic robot. This would at least be plausible, whereas the photographing of his nose would not.

K'A SSU—the legend is that a Chinese queen wove the first silk.

Request:—"I have recently read several books about China. They devoted much space to the silk industry and in several instances mentioned a product called k'a ssu. Is this allied to silk? Can you give me any additional information about it?"

—W. F. LOWE, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reply by Mr. Seward Cramer:—Chinese history is tightly bound by silk. It was this rare cloth that first attracted the attention of Persia and Europe to the great unknown country to the east. It was impossible for them to make the silk cloth in the west and yet we find references to silk several centuries B. C., which clearly points to the fact that there were trade relations between China and the outside world at that time.

As far back as Chinese history goes—and that is over four thousand years now—silk is mentioned. It is legendary that silk was first made by a queen who sought to prove her industry and patience by unravelling a silk-worm cocoon and then weaving the delicate threads into a piece of cloth. This proved such a remarkable material that larger cloths were made and tested for wear and other useful properties. Gradually the raising of silk-worms and the weaving of the cloth became one of the leading industries of China. It was used for making clothes, tapestries, banners and hangings.

Nobody knows when k'a ssu was first invented. It had become so commonplace by the time the oldest existent records were made that no special mention is given to this lovely form of weaving. We do know that it was in a high state of perfection in the tenth century as there are authentic pieces in existence today dating from that period. These are not common, as a matter of fact there are only a comparatively few examples more than a hundred years old.

The term k'a ssu is applied to a very particular form of weaving and the finished product is so fragile and colorful that it is used only for decorative purposes. Until recent times introduced a new type of loom, k'a ssu was always woven on a primitive loom built to the size of the finished product and with the warp (or lengthwise) threads fixed in place. The woof (or crosswise) threads furnished the color and pattern and were so closely woven that the warp never showed through.

After the pattern and colors were selected, the silk threads were dyed the proper shade and the weaving commenced. Different colors

never crossed each other nor were they mixed. This would work fine in designs like the Roman scarfs where the colors were all on a horizontal plane but the Chinese wanted figures in a woven picture. As no colors were to overlap and each was to be individual, this would be difficult if two shades were to meet in a perpendicular as there would be no method of tying the pattern together or joining it. They got around this by having all large areas meet on a slant and thus the warp threads would serve as an anchorage for both colors.

The completed effect is really beautiful. The design appears on both sides as a complete picture—indeed, it is often impossible to tell the right side from the wrong. When held against the light, the different patterns stand out distinctly as there is a clear space of light coming through to show where the two colors have not been allowed to overlap. It gives the appearance of delicate appliqué work.

I mentioned that the older pieces were made on a primitive loom. This form had no appliance to tamp the weaving down and make it solid. This tamping had to be done with the finger nails which were grown long and trained to delicate points which could be inserted between the warp threads. This meant that the weaving would not be quite uniform, which adds all the more charm.

If your museum has an example of k'a ssu, it would well repay you to study it as one of the highest examples of the weaver's art.

A LETTER on geography: Turnagain Arm, Alaska.

Request:—Can you tell me anything about the land around Turnagain Arm, Alaska? Are there many "bays" or arms extending from Turnagain Arm? Are there any glaciers in the locality? Do these glaciers have any rivers or streams formed from their melting? Is it dangerous to go in an open small boat along the shore in Turnagain Arm? Where can I get a reliable map of the terrain or land of this section? Also of the "Arm" and its extensions?

How early in the spring can one get into this section? How deep is the snow in winter? Is there any game in this section?

—L. C. PENDELL, Stockton, Calif.

Reply by Mr. T. S. Solomons:—No, there are no bays or arms extending from Turnagain Arm, Alaska. The shore line is fairly continuous, with no indentations of any side. The railroad runs along most of the north shore, which would be impracticable if there were extensive indentations. It is a country of glaciers, but these are mostly from the high mountain chain on the Seward and Prince William side of the Peninsula. On the east the country is less precipitous. Why not get maps from the Geological Survey (Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.) at small cost? These will show you pretty much in detail the lay of the land.

All glaciers have rivers or streams formed by their melting, of course, but you will see from the map that no streams of size issue into Turnagain Arm except on the south, if you wish to call them rivers of size. They are about ten to fifty or sixty miles long. The larger, westerly ones doubtless head in bodies of ice. I am not sure. The map does not show it. That is, the large map. Local maps of larger scale may show this detail. Get the list and pick out and then send for such bulletins or maps as show the region.

I do not think it dangerous to go in a small boat along the shore. All large bodies in southern Alaska, even though landlocked, are subject to occasional squalls, and at such times an unseaworthy boat, or one ill-manned, might be in danger if not close to shore. Usually the interior waters of Alaska are calm and safe. To voyage the south coast of Alaska in a small boat, however, unless a good-sized boat expertly handled, is dangerous.

This country is accessible practically all the year to boat and train. The snow is often quite deep, probably five to ten feet on the level at times, and of course where exposed to wind it might drift to any depth in rifts and against sharp banks. It is a country of very heavy precipitation, especially in summer. Interior Alaska, on the other hand, is almost a dry country. This section—the Kenai peninsula—is renowned as a game country the world over. Of late the game has been much reduced, but it is still a splendid game section. Moose, some caribou, deer and big bear especially. Also mountain sheep and other game. In general, you are considering a part of Alaska than which there is none finer in the whole northland. Scenery, climate (except rather rainy), richness, varied resources and the like.

Ask Adventure Service

Fishing.—JOHN B. THOMPSON (OZARK RIPLEY) care *Adventure.*

Small Boating.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Canoeing.—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 117 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating.—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping.—MAJ. CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., American Tourist Camp Ass'n, 152 W. 65th St., N. Y. C.

Yachting.—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Motor Vehicles; Automotive and Aircraft Engines.—EDMOND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers.—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 69, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons.—CAPT. ROBERT E. GARDNER, 1354 N. 4th St., Apt. 3, Columbus, O.

First Aid, Hiking, Health-Building.—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, N. J.

Camping and Woodcraft.—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Mining and Prospecting.—*North America.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-Precious Stones.—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Calif.

Forestry in U. S., Big game hunting.—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry.—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Box 575, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading.—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 North Main St., Paris, Ill.

All Army Matters.—CAPT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

World War.—*Strategy, tactics, leaders, armies, participants, historical and political background.*—BEDA VON BERCHEM, care *Adventure.*

All Navy Matters.—LT. CMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U. S. N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Fla.

U. S. Marine Corps.—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, R. F. D. 1, Box 614, La Canada, Calif.

Aviation.—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

State Police, Federal Secret Service, etc.—FRANCIS H. BENT, 184 Fair Haven Rd., Fair Haven, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police.—PATRICK LEE, 157-11 Sanford Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

Horses.—MAJ. THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

North and Central American Anthropology.—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Taxidermy.—SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *Insects, poisonous, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *Reptiles and Amphibians.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ornithology *Birds; Habits, distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.

Stamps.—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals.—HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society. Broadway, at 156th St., N. Y. C.

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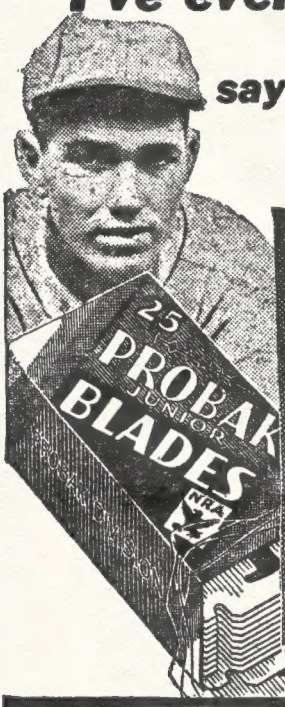

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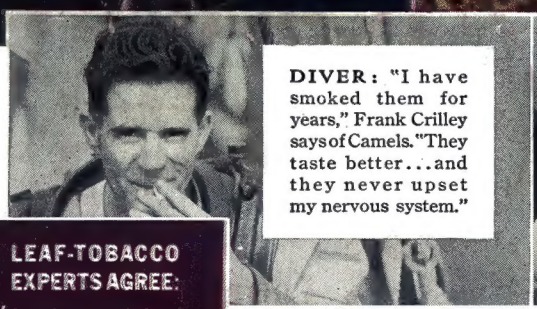

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